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THE LION'S SHARE

BY
MRS. CLARK WARING

PUBLISHERS

BELFORD, CLARKE & COMPANY

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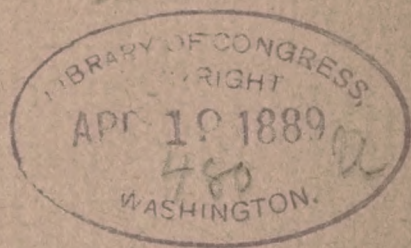
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THE LION'S SHARE

Malvina Sarah ^{BY} (Black) Waring
" MRS. CLARK WARING "

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THE LION'S SHARE.

CHAPTER I.

SUKEY IN THE MEADOW.

"WHERE'S that cow?"

The speaker was old Farmer Creecy. He was coming up the back steps, and his words were addressed to his wife, who was manipulating an archaic churn on the back porch.

"What cow?" sharply retorted Mrs. Creecy, startled out of all knowledge of four-footed beasts by the unexpectedness of the question.

"*What cow!* Look here, now, Alvirey, have you got any sense at all? How many cows have we got? Can't you count that far? Don't you know how many?"

Alvirey did. Looking like a sheep being led to the slaughter, and feeling worse than two sheep under such circumstances, she hung her head low, and answered, meekly:

"One cow."

"Then I ask you, again, where is that cow?"

"And why do you ask me that, Jacob Creecy? You know as well as I do where she is. She's down in the meadow."

"And where's Mell?"

"Down there, too. They ain't nobody else to keep Sukey out the corn."

"Ain't, hey? Ha! ha! ha! That's all you know about it! Where does you keep your senses, anyhow, Alvirey? Out o' doors? Because, I ain't never had the good luck to find any of 'em at home, yet, as often as I've called! This very minute there's somebody else down in the meadow long side o' Mell."

"Why, who, Jacob? Who can it be?"

"You wouldn't guess in a month o' Sundays, Alvirey. Not you! Guessing to the point ain't in your line. It's that chap what's staying over at the Guv'nor's, who looks like he had the title-deeds of the American continent stuffed loose in his vest-pocket."

"You don't say so! Lor'! Jacob, what does he want down there with Mell?"

"What does he want? If you had a single grain of sense, Alvirey, you'd know without any telling. He wants to make a fool of her! That's what a man generally has in view when he runs after a woman. But, I am a thinking, that chap won't make no fool out of Mell, for Mell's got a long head, like her old daddy, and a tongue of learning to back it! Just you keep on a saying nothing. You never missed getting things into a mess yet, as I knows on, 'cept when you let 'em alone. I'll shut down on him right away, and then I'll be *blarsted* if Mell can't take care of herself! Don't be nowise uneasy, Alvirey. Mell takes after her old dad."

Alvirey did not return immediately to her churning. She craned her neck and got on her tiptoes, and gazed curiously after her husband as his stout figure rolled heavily to the edge of the breezy woodland, and thence

beyond to the newly cleared grounds, and onward still to that narrow path among the pines, whose turf-margined and daisy-dotted track was a covert way to the meadow. Presently, through its mazy windings and the medium of a hazy summer atmosphere, Mr. Creecy came in sight of a youthful Jersey, sedately cropping some tender blades of grass on the enticing borderland of a promising cornfield, and a young girl not far away seated on an old stump in a shady nook under a clump of trees. Her costume consisted principally of an airy muslin frock, nebulous in figure, and falling about her in simple folds, and a white sun-bonnet, which was a bonnet and something more—to be explicit, an artistic elaboration of tucks and puffs and piled-on embroideries, beneath which peeped forth a face as prodigal of blooming sweets as a basket heaped with spring flowers.

At her feet lounged in careless fashion a young man. He was lithe and straight, and had that striking cast of countenance which catches the observant eye on first sight. This look of distinction, which in him was as marked in form as in feature, has been called, not inaptly, thoroughbredness. A self-made man never has it. All that a man may do will not put it upon himself, but his son possesses it as an heritage.

Looking upon such persons, we know intuitively that they have always had the best of everything, beginning from their cradle, the best of *its* kind.

Not always strong, these thoroughbred faces are generally attractive. The one before us possesses both strength and beauty. We may consider it foremost among his first-rate advantages.

Seeing this huge monster of humanity bearing down upon them, slow-wabbling, like a proboscidian mammal, fast-puffing, like a steam locomotive, the young man lifted himself to a sitting posture, and without any suspicion as to the true state of the case, remarked to his companion :

“Here comes a doughty old customer, upon my word ! ‘What tempest, I trow, threw this whale with so many tons of oil’——”

The young lady cleared her throat—she cleared it point-blankly.

“Excuse me, but, perhaps you do not know, that is—is—my father.”

Stammering forth these words, she at the same time turned very red in the face.

This was slightly awkward, or would have been to another. As for this young man, he did not mind a little thing like that.

“I did not know it,” he told the girl, unruffled; “I crave your pardon. The fact is, it is an habitual failing of mine to make sport of fat people. The lubberly clumsiness of a huge corporation of human flesh is to me so irresistibly comic ! My mother tells me a dreadful day of retribution is coming—a day, wherein I shall be fifty and fat, and a fit subject for the ridicule of others.”

“I cannot discern the foreshadows of such a day,” replied the girl, glancing with unconscious approbation at the admirable outlines of a figure whose proportions were well-nigh faultless. She fingered nervously at her bonnet-strings, smiled a panic-stricken little smile, broke out into a cold sweat of fearful expectation, and through all the horrors of the situation, tried her best to emulate the young man’s inimitable air of cultured composure. He got up at this juncture from the ground, not hastily, not awkwardly, but in his own time and at his own pleasure, and standing there, entirely at his ease, looked every inch the living exemplar of that expressive little phrase—“don’t-care.”

Some persons object to being interrupted, he did not.

The girl stood up, too, but stood with such a difference ! More and more disconcerted she became with every passing second, so ashamed was she

of her unsightly old father, in his blue cotton farm clothes, dirty and baggy, and his red cotton handkerchief—no redder than his face—so ashamed, and with such a sense of guilt in her shame! Truth to tell, the contrast between the two men thus confronted, was almost startling; the bloated ungainliness of the one, the sinewy shapeliness of the other; the misshapen grotesqueness of the one, and the sculpturesque comeliness of the other. It was a contrast painful to any intelligent observer, and for the poor girl before us, about to introduce a lover of such mold to a father of such aspect, it was like being put to the rack.

“Mr. Devonhough, father.”

“Mr. *Who?*” gasped a big voice, struggling out from smothered depths of grossness.

“Mr. Devonhough,” repeated the daughter, looking all manner of ways, “a friend of the Rutlands.”

“How does ye, Mr. Deviloh?” inquired the old farmer, in his exceedingly countrified, agonizingly familiar manner; extending a big, rough, red, and very filthy hand to be shaken by this exquisite sprig of refined gentility. Mr. Devonhough, needless to mention, touched it as gingerly as if it had been a glaringly wide awake and aggressively disposed Cobra de Capello. He endured the ceremony in silence, however; about as much as could be reasonably expected from one so superbly self-controlled.

“What will father do next?” wondered the perturbed young lady, in burning suspense. What he did was to stare unmercifully into the young man’s face, as if every separate feature was a distinct and incomprehensible phenomenon, and, afterward, inspect him with due carefulness, and at his very deliberate leisure, from the hat on his head to the shoes on his feet.

Mr. Devonhough did not flinch. Some persons object to being stared at; he did not. It is very foolish to mind such things. And besides, he had eyes as well as this old Brobdingnagian, and knew how to use them to quite as good a purpose. While the bellicose Creecy took in slowly the outward manifestations of this bland young stranger, the young stranger himself, in about two seconds and a half, had cross-examined every constituent element in the old man’s body, and thoroughly analyzed even the marrow in his bones.

We have intimated that the old man’s figure was bad; his face was a dreadful climax to a bad figure, so marred it was by worry, so battered by time, so travel-stained on life’s rough journey, so battle-scarred in life’s hard strife. Behind this forbidding frontage, the old man kept in store a good, sound heart; but what availed that to his present inquisitor? A good, sound heart in an ugly body, is the last thing a young man looks for in this world, or cares to find.

From the inspection of so much ugliness, Mr. Devonhough glanced towards the daughter; it was merely a glance, for with a delicate sense of feeling, he quickly looked away in an opposite direction. Flushed she was with shame, ill at ease, ready to cry out with a bitter cry, accusingly towards heaven, unspeakably humiliated; but, withal, a winsome lass, so fresh and fair, so pretty. Such a father! Such a girl! In heaven’s name how do such things come about?

Satisfied with his investigations, Mr. Creecy now remarked, quite cheerfully:

“I s’pose, sir, you air a drover?”

“A drover? No, sir; as far as I am able to judge, I am not. More, I cannot say, as I do not know what you mean.”

"Den I reckon, sir, you air er furiner inter the bargain."

"No, sir; not a foreigner either, though I was educated abroad—partly."

"Dat's it," ejaculated the old man, triumphantly. "Eddicashun is the thing what plays the Ole Harry wid the onderstan'in'. Dar is my little Mell, dar, when she war er chit of er gal, an' knowed nuthin' 'bout the things writ down in books, she war er mighty smart gal. She had a onderstan'in' of plain English, mity near es good es mine, an' she could keep house, an' make butter, an' look arter farm bizniss in gin'ral, not ter say nuthin' 'bout sowin' her own cloes; an' now, bless God! arter gittin' er fine eddicashun, she don't know the diff'rance 'tween er hoss an' er mule, or er bull an' er heifer; an' she'd no mo' let yer ketch 'er wid er broom in her han', or er common word on her lips dan steal er chickin! Es fur es my experance goes, nuthin' spiles er gal like high schoolin'. I purt myself ter a heap er trouble, young man, ter edicate my only darter, but I'd purt myself ter er long site mo', ter onedicate 'er, ef I know'd how!"

This speech amused Mr. Devonhough to such an extent that he reluctantly displayed a set of very white teeth, and Mell's rather strained gayety found an agreeable echo in his pleasant, sounding laughter. Even the old farmer's features relaxed. He was "consid'ble hefted up" at the undisguised effect of his own facetiousness.

"The reason I axed ef yer wuz er cattle dealer," he proceeded, "is dis. You 'pears ter be in the habit er comin' hur every mornin' ter see our fine Jersey. She's er regular beauty, ain't she?"

"She is—worth coming to see; but since you press the point, I feel called upon to disavow coming here for any such purpose."

Here Mr. Devonhough turned his contemplative glance from the direction of Suke's charms, and fixed it mischievously upon Mell who, having already, since the beginning of this interview, looked into the four quarters of the globe, now dropped her eyes in search of the mysteries beneath it.

"To be honest wid ye," admitted old Creecy, "I didn't 'low ye wuz arter Suke, ezzactly, but I sorter reckon'd ef yer'd come ter see Mell, it's the front do' yer'd er knockt at, es I ust ter do when I went er courtin' my gal—Mell's mammy—an' had it out comferterble in the parler. We has er very nice home up dar on the hill, with er whole lot er fine furnisher in the front room, which Mell never rested 'till I went in debt ter buy. Now its mos' paid fur, an' I kinder 'low Mell 'ud be glad ter see yer mos' enny time."

"Thank you," responded Mr. Devonhough, with frigidity.

"He mought go now, Mell, ef yer'd ax him."

"Not to-day, thank you," turning to Mell, with more graciousness of manner. "In fact, I have not yet breakfasted;" and he abruptly bowed adieu, and made his escape.

He was quite out of sight before father or daughter addressed a word to each other. At length the old farmer demanded roughly of the girl "What in the tarnation she wuz er blubberin' erbout?"

"What, indeed!" sobbed Mell, in a frenzy of passion, and with eyes of storm. "I have good cause to cry. What else can I do? I can't say *Damn!*"

"Can't yer? Why not? 'Tain't the cuss what's so bad; it's the feelin'. Ef the devil's in yer, turn him out, I say. I ain't no advercate er bad language, but ef er man feels like cussin' all the time, he mought as well cuss! Dat's my opinion. An' ef it will help yer to cool down er bit, my darter, I'll express them sentiments, which ain't too bad for a young lady ter feel,

but only to utter. So here goes—but remember, Lord! 'tain't me, it's Mell—damn! damn! damn! Sich er koncited, stiff starched, buckram-backed, puppified popinjay, as this Mr. Devil—"

"Hush your mouth," screamed the daughter, beside herself with rage; "I don't want *him* damned!"

"You don't! Then who?"

Mell, wrought up to the highest pitch of exasperation, made no reply beyond looking daggers and gnashing her teeth.

"Not your old dad, Mell?"

"No, father; I don't want you damned either. But what did you come down here for? What did you call him a cattle dealer for? What did you talk about such horrid, nasty, disgusting things, for? Oh! I am mortified almost to death."

"I sorter reckon'd yer'd hate it worser'n pisen," chuckled the old farmer; "but er good dose of pisen is jess what some folks needs bad. Come, come, Mell, hold your horses! It's your eddicashun what's er botherin' of yer!"

"I wish to God I had no education!" exclaimed Mell, passionately. "It's turned out to be the worst thing I ever did do, to get an education! It has made me unhappy ever since I came home and found things so different from what they ought to be. How poor and mean a home it is! How lowly its surroundings, how rude its ways and how I am degraded and fettered and hampered and looked down upon for things beyond my control!"

"I knows—I knows"—answered her old father, with that suspicious thrill-in-the-voice of a subjugated parent. "It's yo' ignerront ole daddy an' yo' hard-workin' ole mammy what's er hamperin' ye! We ain't got no loving little Mell, no longer, to say, Popsy and Mamsy, so cute, but only er fine young miss, who minces out 'father' and 'mother' so gran', an' can't hardly abide us, the mammy what bare her, and the daddy what give her bein'. I knows. Ef it warnt fer us, ye'd be the ekill of the finess' lady in the lan', wouldn't ye, Mell? Wall, ye kin be, my darter, in spite o' us, ef you play yo' kerds rite. You'se got es big er forshun es Miss Rutlan'—bigger, I believe. Hern's in her pockit, yourn's in yo' phiz. But, arter all, a gal's purty face don't 'mount ter mor'n one row er pins, ef she ain't got no brains to hope it erlong. Play yo' purty face, Mell; play her heavy, but back her strong wid gumshun! Then you'll git ter be er gran' lady o' fashion, in spite o' yer ugly ole dad an' common ole mammy. Now, I wants ye ter tell me somethin' 'bout dat young jackanapes. What's his bizniss? What is he?"

"A perfect gentleman!"

"Sartingly—sartingly. I seed dat, as soon es I sot my eyes on 'im, but what sorter man? My ole dad ust ter say, 'one fust-rate man could knock inter blue blazes er whole cart load er gentlemine'. I'll tell yer fer er fack, er gentlemine ain't nothin' nohow, but er man wid his dirty spots white-washt. But what air the import er this one's intentions respectin' of ye?"

Whatever her ideas on this point, the girl was too modest to express them.

"Wall, maybe you kin tell me the dispersition of your own min' regardin' him?"

"Yes, I can do that," she replied with alacrity. "Make up your mind to it. I'm going marry him just as soon as he asks me. And the sooner the better!"

"Exactly! But when is he gwine ter?"

"How do I know, father?"

"I kin tell ye, Mell. *Never!*"

"You don't know one thing about it—not a thing!"

"Sartingly not! It's the young uns these days what knows everything, an' the ole ones what dont know nuthin'. But yo' ole dad knows what he's talkin' 'bout. The likes o' him will never marry any gal who puts herself on footin' wid er cow. Does yer reckon Miss Rutlan' would excep' his visits in er cornfiel', and let him make so free?"

"It only happened so, father."

"Hump! It's happen'd so er good many times, es I happen ter know. Happenin' things don't come roun' so reg'ler, Mell. See hur, my gal, 'tain't no use argufyin' wid me on the subjec'. I ain't got nary objecshun ergin yo' marryin' the young man; provided—now listen, Mell!—*provided you kin git him.* He's es purty es er grayhoun', an' I reckon has es much intelligence, but insted ef lettin' him make a fool er you, es he's now tryin' ter do, turn the tables, Mell. The biggest fool on top o' this airth is the woman who wants ter git married; the next biggest fool is the man in er hurry ter git er wife! One mo' word, Mell, an' I'll go my way, an' you kin go yourn. Ain't gwine ter mortify you no mo'. Remember, what I say: thar's only one thing you dassent do wid er fine gentlemine—*trus' him!* Don't trus' him, Mell; don't trus' him! My chile, the good Lord ain't denied ye brains, use 'em! Here ends the chapter on Devilho—"

Turning off abruptly, Mr. Creecy puffed sturdily up the hill, leaving his daughter deep in the sulks, but with much solid food for reflection.

Her eyes followed him sullenly. He was but one remove from—a darkey. Never had he appeared so irredeemably ugly, awkward and illiterate; never acted so altogether and exasperatingly vulgar, horrid and abominable, and yet she pondered deeply on his words. Their effect upon her surprised even herself. Can an unschooled man be wise? Ah, Mell! wisdom is not curbed by rhetoric, nor ruled by grammar. The *respicere finem* of the unlettered appears oftentimes to be *jure divino*.

After a while Mell wiped away the very last tear of agonized pride, which hung like a dewdrop on her long curling lashes. The gall and wormwood of her present feelings were somewhat abated. She knew what she was going to do.

"I'll get out of this!" exclaimed Mell, speaking to herself in particular, and into space at large. "Get out of it, the very first chance."

Get out of what, Mell? This humdrum life of little cares and big trials? this uncongenial association with an overworked and sickly old mother (once as pretty as yourself, Mell) and an ill-favored, ill-mannered and illiterate old father?

Is that what Mell intends to get out of?

Yes, and she means to do it in the easiest possible way, according to her own conception of the matter. Other girls may find it necessary to work their way, by a long and tedious process, out of disagreeable surroundings, but she will do it with one brilliant master-stroke—*coûte qu'il coûte*.

Put a placard on pretty Mell; proclaim her in the market place; hawk the news upon the street corners; inscribe it on the pages of the great Book up yonder!

To unite her destinies with some being—not divinely, blessing and being blessed—not vitally, loving and being loved; not necessarily a being affectionately responsive and, therefore, fitted to become the sharer of her joy and the assuager of her grief, but simply some being of masculine endowment serving in the capacity of a latch-key, through whose instrumentality

she can gain admission into the higher worldly courts, for whose untasted delights her whole nature panted, is henceforth, until accomplished, the end and aim of Mellville Creecy's existence.

Ho, there! all ye buyers, come this way!

Here's a woman for sale!

CHAPTER II.

A MOTE IN THE EYE.

IN Pompeii, eighteen hundred years ago, people—a good many people, were dreadfully afraid of dogs; so much so that many of the householders in that famous old city put *Cave Canem* on their front-door-sills, as a friendly piece of advice to all comers-in and goers-out. Just how their feelings were affected towards the domestic cow, we are left to conjecture; but now, after eighteen hundred years, and in less famous localities, people—a good many people—are still afraid of dogs, and without a nice sense of discernment in their fears, include cows, putting the two together as beasts that want “discourse of reason.”

Now, this is unrighteous judgment; for even a cow should be looked at fairly, even if she does show the cloven hoof. There are cows and cows, as well as men and men. Suke, the young Jersey, would not toss her horns at a butterfly, much less hurt a baby. She was sagacity itself, and granting she did not know the buttered side of bread, which is likely, she did know, to a moral certainty, where she got her grass and how.

Early the next morn, Suke began to low, and hoping to be heard by virtue of insistence, kept it up until nightfall, by which time she had bellowed herself hoarse. Suke could make nothing out of it, and no doubt dropped to sleep, theorizing on the perversity of remote contingencies, and wondering why it was that she had spent all the long hours of that breezy summer day in the lot, and the companion of her outings in the house.

The late afternoon found Mell in dainty attire, seated on the front porch, gazing wistfully in the direction of the Bigge House. He had not found her in the meadow in the morning, perhaps, he would seek for her in the little house on the hill, in the evening. It could not be that he had avoided paying her any attention that could be noticed by others; she had sometimes thought so, but then it could not be. She dismissed the idea; it was too uncomplimentary to herself, and too defamatory towards him.

But the slow hours dragged on; he came not. Mell sat alone. At ten o'clock she crept sadly into bed—into bed, but not into the profound slumber of youth and a mind at ease. Far into the night, her unquiet thoughts were yet heaving to and fro; advancing as restless billows of the sea, retreating as vaporous cloud-mists in the sky. Her snow-white bed—a feathered nest—erst so well suited to light-hearted repose, had changed its flexible lines of comfort into rigid lines of care.

Dropping to sleep at last, Mell dreamed she had made the world all over, from pole to pole, after a new model and on a modern plan, and having fitted it up expressly for her own needs, found it ever so much pleasanter, and a great improvement on the old.

It was upon the same old world, however, she opened her eyes the next morning, and into one of its most worrying days, holding, indeed, more than its share of disappointment and worry.

But when the third day was drawing to its weary close, and her longing

heart longed still unsatisfied, existence had become a burden almost insupportable to poor Mell. For the third time she donned her prettiest dress. He *must* come to-day. Out again upon the little porch, with a book in her hand, and trying to read. Mell was oppressed with a sense of extreme isolation, a wasting famine of the heart, a parching thirst of the eye. In her despairing loneliness, incapable of any other occupation, she scanned eagerly every passer by; brooded deeply on many passing thoughts. This lonely waiting, in a small waste corner of the great wide universe, for a girl of Mell's ambitious turn of mind, was, in truth, hard. It was lowest pauperism to her panting spirit—panting to achieve not little things but great. Humble strife in a little world, amid work-a-day environment, and among everyday people, had no charms for Mell. Such living was, in a word, unbearable.

And over there across that beauteous valley, in the enchanted halls of the unattainable, life was a delightful series of interesting events, redolent of delicate sentiments and sweet-smelling savors, spiced with novelty, brimful of pleasure, amusing, absorbing, far-reaching, all-embracing; in brief, a ceaseless symposium, purged of every ugly, common or narrow element, as roseate and as captivating to the fancy, as hand-painted satin framed in mosaic.

A boy walked up the garden path. The young lady seated on the porch, saw him coming, and a feeling of exultation shot through all the blood in her veins. The boy held a note in his hand, and Mell jumped into the contents of that note, intellectually, in less than the millionth part of a second. He could not stand it any longer; he was writing to know if he might call, and when. She had a great mind to let him come this very evening, though he did not deserve it; but then, do men ever deserve just what they get, good and bad, at women's hands?

"A note, ma'am," said the boy. Mell took it in silence, opened it tremulously, and read:

"Suke is unhappy. Me too. Don't disappoint us to-morrow, and send me a bit of a line, sweet lassie, to say that you will not. J. P. D."

"The scribblings of a school-boy," muttered Mell, inconceivably dashed.

"No answer," she told the boy. When the messenger was beyond reach of recall, she was sorry she had not replied to the note, or sent word, yes; for, perhaps, it would be better to see him once more, have a plain talk, and come to some understanding. The more she dwelt upon the matter, the more certain she became that this was her best course; so upon the morrow, the half-past five o'clock breakfast was hardly well over, when, with alternate hope and fear measuring swords within her, she fled to the lot for Suke. With one arm thrown affectionately around the Jersey's neck, the two proceeded most amicably to the meadow. There she waited an hour nearly, before Jerome came; but he did come, eventually, wearing the loveliest of shooting-jackets, with an English primrose in his buttonhole, radiantly handsome, deliciously cool, and as much at his leisure as if it did not make much difference to him whether he ever reached his destination or not.

Thus Jerome—but what of Mell? Every medullary thread, every centripetal and centrifugal filament in her entire body was excited over his coming. She was flushed, and so hot and flurried, and had been waiting for him, it seemed to her, twelve months at least, and it enraged her now to see him sauntering so slowly toward her, just as if they had parted five minutes ago. Poor Mell, after her experiences of the past three days, was

in that condition of body when a trifle presses upon one's nervous forces with all the weight of a mountain. Irritated, she returned his good morning coldly.

"Dear me, Mr. Devonhough! Is it really you? Why did you come? I did not send you word I would be here."

"No, you did not. Nevertheless, I knew you would."

"Nevertheless, you knew nothing of the sort! How can you say that? I had a strong notion not to come."

Jerome made a gesture of incredulity.

"Oh, a notion! I dare say. Girls live on notions, bonbons, sugar-plums, taffy, and what not; a pound of sweetened flattery to every half ounce of wholesome truth. But laying all notions aside, you will always come, Mellville, when I send for you."

"How dare you," began Mell, nettled to the quick and purposed to give him an emphatic piece of her mind, and then ignominiously breaking down, constrained, dismayed, crimsoning to the tips of her ears, paling to the curves of her lips, and wishing she had died before she left the farm-house that morning.

"And now I have offended you," said Jerome drawing nearer, "and I did not mean to do that, pretty one! I cannot help teasing you, sometimes, because when you are teased your face has that innocent, grieved expression of a thwarted child, which I do so dearly love to see. And I must, perforce, do something in self-defence, you have been so cruel to me." His tones were low, now, and as oily as a lubricating life-buoy. "I have waited for you one hour each day; I have gone away after every waiting, desolate and unhappy. Don't you know, when two people think of each other as we do, when two people love each other as we do, that separation is the worst form of misery? Then why have you been so cruel, Mell?"

Peeping under the fluted archway of the white sun-bonnet for an answer, his face came in dangerous nearness to its wearer; their quickened breath united in a symphony of sweet sighs, their quickened pulses throbbed in a unison of reciprocal emotion.

One moment more, and—Mell stood off at some little distance, looking back roguishly at the figure kneeling alone beside the old stump, with outstretched arms tenderly embracing naught, and stealthy lips defrauded of their prey.

Mr. Devonhough did mind a losing game such as this. To be made to feel foolish and to look foolish, was more than he could tolerate under any conjuncture of circumstances. He extricated himself as speedily and as gracefully as possible.

"Miss Creecy!"

"Mr. Devonhough!"

"You will probably treat me with ordinary civility, at the time of our next meeting."

"And you will probably do the same toward me."

"We shall see, as to that."

He bowed blandly, and turned upon his heel. He was going away? Well, he wouldn't go far. Mell was so confident on this point, that she seated herself comfortably on the old stump again, and gave herself no uneasiness. She could not credit the evidences of her own senses when the moving figure became first a mere speck upon the horizon, and then a something gone, lost, swallowed up into the unseen.

"It passes belief," said Mell; "surely he will come back, even yet!"

She waited one hour longer; she waited two—he evidently did not intend to come back.

She went home with a troubled heart.

The next morning, feeling somewhat more cheerful at what she considered the certain prospect of seeing him again, and to a somewhat better purpose, she called for Suke, in feverishly high spirits, and the two set off together on a spirited race down the hill.

One hour—two hours—three hours—and not a sign of her truant lover.

Mell burst into an agony of tears.

"I am no match for him," she sobbed. "He is heartless and cynical, and imperious and selfish. He does not care in the very least bit for me and I"—springing to her feet, and dashing away her tears—"I do not know, at this moment, Jerome Devonhough, whether I most love or hate you!"

This feeling of sullen resentment sustained her through that long, long day. In the cool of the evening her mother sent her on an errand to the little country store, about a mile distant. Coming back she encountered a gay cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen on horseback, conspicuous among them, Jerome. She had no reason to suppose he recognized, or even saw, the quiet figure plodding along on foot, and catching the dust from their horses' hoofs.

"This is my life," said Mell, looking after them with yellow eyes, "while others ride, I walk!"

The noise of their clattering feet and merry voices had scarcely died away, when there came another sound; faint at first and uncertain, it came nearer and nearer. A solitary horseman dashed up to her side and dismounted.

"Jerome! Is it you?" exclaimed Mell, with a glad start, forgetting all the anger she had been nursing against him since yesterday, in the joy of seeing him again. "How could you tear yourself away from that lively crowd?"

"One, if she is the right one, is crowd enough for me," declared Jerome, with a laugh; and throwing his bridle reins negligently across his arm, he walked along beside her. "When I saw you, Mellville, I dropped my whip out of pure delight, and as it is a dainty trifle belonging to Clara—Miss Rutland, that is—adorned with a silver stag's head and tender associations, I had, of course, to come back for it. At all events, I could not have closed my eyes this night, without seeing you, making my humble confessions, and imploring your forgiveness for my conduct of yesterday. I behaved abominably. I confess it. I am truly sorry. And, at the risk of falling in your esteem, I am going to tell you something—my temper is a thing vile—villainous, but it does not often get the better of me as it did yesterday. Forgive me, dearest?"

"I am not your dearest," Mell informed him, with head erect.

"Not? Why, how's that? 'Nay, by Saint Jamy,' but you are! I have one heart, but one, it is all yours; you have one, but one, it is all mine. We are to each other, dearest, *Ita lex scripta*."

"The matter is one in which I, myself, shall have a say-so."

"You have had a say-so! You have said: 'Jerome, I love you!'"

"How can you speak so falsely? It is not true—I did not say so."

"Not in words," conceded her tormentor, "but you do, all the same, don't you, petite?"

"I am not your petite, either," protested Mell, driven almost to desperation.

"No? Then you are sure to be my darling. That's it, Mell! You are certainly a darling, and mine."

"I am not!" shrieked Mell, choking with anger. This mockery of a sore subject was really unbearable.

"Not my darling, either?" inquired Jerome, grave as a Mussulman. "Then what the dickens are you?"

"A woman not to be trifled with," said Mell, hotly; "who finds it much easier to magnify injuries than to forgive them."

"Like the rest of us," interposed Jerome; "but that is not Christian, you know."

"You are enough to turn the saintliest Christian into a cast-away," proceeded Mell, severely. "Can't you be serious for a little while? I am not a child to be mocked at and cajoled and cozened and hood-winked, *faire pattes de velours*, treated to flim-flam and sweet-meats, knowing all the while that you are ashamed of my mere acquaintance."

"You can't think such a thing!"

"I do think it! I have cause to think it! See here, suppose you were in love with Miss Rutland—"

"I can't suppose that! I couldn't be if my life depended on it; not after seeing you. Why do you wish me to suppose that?"

He shot a keen glance at her.

"That I may ask you this question—If you were, would you make love to her after the same methods you employ toward me?"

"No; I don't believe I would. I am quite sure I would not. The woman is herself responsible for the way in which love is made to her. I can't be with you any time without wanting to call you some pet name, and I never feel that way with Clara."

"It is my fault, then, that you are so disrespectful?"

"Am I disrespectful?"

"You are. Listen to me for a moment, Mr. Devonhough. If you really care for my society, as you say you do, why do you not seek it as you do the society of other young ladies—at home? My father is a poor man, but he is honest; and honesty should count for something, even in good society. He is also illiterate, but no one can say aught against his character; and character ought to be more desirable than much learning. Then, again, although the blood in my veins may lack in blueness, it is pure, which is a matter of some importance. Altogether, I don't see why you should look down upon me."

"I do not look down upon you!" Jerome was earnest enough now. "I know that I ought to have called at the house, but—ahem! my time is not exactly at my own disposal. In a word, I have not had an opportunity."

Jerome, saying this, looked far away in pensive thoughtfulness. Mell, listening, looked hard into his face.

"Opportunity!" ejaculated Mell. "You manage somehow to call upon me pretty often elsewhere!"

"Not at a visitable hour."

"Were I a man and wanted to see a girl, I'd *make* my opportunity!"

She laughed, derisively—there is something very undiverting in such a laugh.

"Would you, Mell? No, you would not. You would do like the rest of mankind; submit as best you could to the inflexible logic of events and do the best you could under the circumstances."

"Is a cornfield the best you can do under the circumstances?"

"It is Mell—the very best. Now, my sweet Mell, I am going to be serious—really serious—dreadfully in earnest. I acknowledge that you have some cause to find fault with me. There are things 'disjoint and out of frame' in my wooing, which I cannot explain to you at this time. Bear with them, bear with me for a little—there's a dear girl—and when I come back—"

"You are going away! Where, Jerome? When?"

"Only a run over to Cragmore, for a week or ten days. I have friends there, who are writing for me. Another guest is coming to the Bigge House, and I rather think we shall be in each other's way, Mell."

She leant upon his words as if they planned

"Eternities of separate sweetness."

"Mell, will your regard for me bear a heavy test? I cannot now speak such words to you as my feelings prompt me to speak, but will you not trust me blindly until certain difficulties which surround me are overcome? Is your affection great enough for that?"

"I do not know," faltered Mell; "I would trust you to the world's end, and to the very crack of doom, if you would only tell me."

"And then it would not be trust," Jerome gently reminded her, with his mysterious smile. Catching his glance of penetrating tenderness, a vivid breathing reality from a misty background of fogs and doubt, under the spell of its enchantment, Mell thought she could. Her face softened.

"It will be hard, Jerome, but I will try."

"Then, believe me, all will yet be well with us. Whatever untoward event may occur, whatever else you may have cause to doubt, never question the sincerity of my attachment. I call upon God, who readeth the heart of man, to witness that you, only, are dear to me—you, only, precious in my sight. Believe that; be patient, and trust me."

The deep silence which followed these words was broken only by their slow moving feet, crushing the crisp leaves beneath them, and the wild palpitations of the girl's heart. Crystal stars made haste to lend their liquid glimmering to the scene, and blinked knowingly at each other from azure heights on high. The sweet south wind, in melting mood, murmured tunelessly above their heads, swelling in delicious diapason of melodious suggestions, and mingling with mysterious elements in stirring pulse and thrilling nerves.

The rasp of a discordant tone, thrust vehemently into this sweet blending of concordant harmonies, disturbed upon a sudden Mell's unwonted peace of soul. She heard her father's voice. He was saying: "Don't truss him, Mell; don't truss him."

"How can I be patient," she asked, with a touch of her old petulance, "unless I know why it is you treat me so? Jerome, tell me your difficulties."

"And by so doing increase them? No. My hands are full enough as it is, and to have you incessantly fretting and fuming about little crooked things which all the fretting in creation won't straighten out, would be more than I could stand. Melville, you must really consent to be guided blindly by my judgment in this matter. I have studied the subject carefully, and it is only for a little while, sweet. We are young, we can afford to take things easy."

"Men of pluck," exclaimed Mell, with spirit, "don't take things easy! They grip hold of things and turn them into moulds of purpose."

"Do they, little wiseacre? Then, manifestly, I am not a man of pluck."

I am made of weak stuff, a feeble straw, perhaps, in your estimation, tossed about by every little puff of air! Ha! ha! ha! How little you know about me, Mell!"

"That is true," responded Mell, promptly, adding, with that lively turn of expression which gave such zest to her conversation, "very little, and that little nothing to your credit!"

Jerome was amused. He laughed and stopped, and forthwith laughed again.

"Ah, Melville, you charm me afresh at every meeting. Where do you get all your *sauce piquant*? Beside you for life, that old meddling busy-body, *ennui*, will never get a single chance at a fellow. Your name ought to be Infinite Variety."

"And yours," retorted Mell, with the quickness he enjoyed, "Palpably Obscure! But here we are at my own gate. Fasten your horse and come in."

Her voice was absolutely pleading.

"I would with ever so much pleasure, but—that whip is yet to be found, and the riders will be coming back. I must at once rejoin them. Good night, Mell."

"Good-night," responded Mell, from the other side of the gate, and in angered tones, "Jerome, have I not spoken plainly enough to you? Must I repeat that I am not your toy—not your plaything—but a resolute woman, determined to maintain my own respect and to accept nothing less than yours? You shall not so much as make free with the tip end of this little finger of mine, until—"

"Well," said Jerome, "let me know the worst. When will that terrible interdict be removed?"

"When you can enforce the right by virtue of possession."

"Heaven speed that moment!" exclaimed he, sighing audibly and mounting his horse. "When shall we meet again, Melville?"

"That rests with you."

"Let me see, then. Not to-morrow, for at daylight we are off to Gale Bluff for the day. Not on Wednesday, for there's a confounded pic-nic afoot for that day. I wish the man who invented pic-nics had been endowed with immortal life on earth and made to go to every blessed one of 'em! But on Thursday, Mell, I shall be in the meadow at the usual hour."

"But I won't!"

"Yes, you will, Mell."

"Positively, *I will not*!"

"Nonsense. What is your objection? Where is the harm? The young ladies at the Bigge House entertain me out of doors."

"Do they?"

Mell was astonished, and began to waver.

"I thought it wasn't considered the thing."

"On the contrary, it is *the* one thing warranted by the best usage. Out-of-doors is now in the fashion. Doctors preach it, preachers expound it, legislators enact it, and the whole people make it a decree *plebiscite*. Clara sits with me for hours under the trees—"

"Oh, does she!" interrupted poor Mell, with a pang. Seeing her way to a question she had long been wanting to ask, she subjoined quickly: "And what do you think of Clara Rutland, Jerome? Do you call her an interesting girl?"

"I never have called her that," replied Jerome, "never that I know of,

but—she'll do. One thing, she can talk a fellow stone blind at one sitting. But that's nothing. Starlings and ravens can talk, too."

At the end of this speech, Mell was doubly anxious to know Jerome's real opinion of Clara Rutland. It seemed to her that the question was more open at both ends than it ever had been before.

Jerome patted his horse's head, told him to "Be quiet, sir!" and resumed the threads of discourse.

"What was I saying? Oh, yes! We live out of doors at the Bigge House. There wouldn't be any use for a house there at all, if it wasn't for bad weather. Those girls try their best to be agreeable, but none of them are *provoquante* and charming, like you, Mell. While they sleep away the sweetest hours of these golden summer mornings, what harm is there in you and I enjoying pleasant converse together in the green fields, inhaling the pure air of heaven? I promise you to be on my best behavior. I promise you to uphold the integrity of the tip end of that little finger inviolate; and so you will be on hand without fail, Mell, and so will I, and so will something else."

"What else, Jerome?"

He bent low from his saddle-bow to whisper into her ear:

"That supreme happiness which is present everywhere when you and I are together. Be sure to come, darling. And now, once more, good-night!"

He galloped off, leaving Mell standing in the gateway, and on the uncomfortable side of a very knotty point. Did Jerome really love her? She believed he did—ardently. Did he love her well enough to surmount those difficulties of which he had spoken? Did he love her well enough to marry her?

"Aye, there's the rub!" cried Mell. Her mind fairly swarmed with ugly suspicions, some of them as infinitesimal, and at the same time as dangerous as those microscopic bacteria which enter the physical laboratory, disorganizing, and, if not quickly eliminated, destroying the very stronghold of life itself. And as biological analysis was not yet, at that time, practiced as a method of research into the germs of things, Mell must needs fall back entirely upon inferential deductions.

Those difficulties, what could they be that she might not know them? If this tantalizing, and yet, withal, most fascinating, of created beings, truly loved her—loved her in love's highest sense, and with no thought of deception, would he at every turn put her off with honeyed words and paltry evasions? Would he have said, "You must really consent to be guided blindly by my judgment in this matter," if he valued her as she valued him?"

Of one thing she was sure; she would be guided blindly by no human being, man or woman, in anything.

"No, I won't!" she audibly informed the dew-damp lilies and the secretive rose, stamping her foot to impress it upon their understanding. Catch any wide-awake, thoroughly independent, altogether self-sufficient and splendidly educated American girl going it blind at any man's behest! She would make short work of his courtship, and him too—first.

Still pacing distractedly up and down the garden path, Mell heard a window open saw a head protrude, and heard a voice, which said:

"Send 'im ter his namesake, Mell. Let 'im git thar before he gits the better o' you!"

"So he shall, father."

"Then go ter bed."

"I am going now—going to bed," she continued, communing with herself—"to bed, but not to the meadow Thursday morning. I'll cut my throat from ear to ear, just before I start to the meadow again at the bidding of Jerome Devonhough!"

Bravo for Mell! Strong in this determination, she is now comparatively safe, except for the one menacing fear, that this sentimental feeling she has for Jerome may interfere with the more serious business of life. Love was all well enough in its way, but what this country maiden panted for, was a new life on a higher plane, with or without love. It was the thing her education demanded. It was the thing she intended to accomplish.

After all, she went to bed in very good spirits. She was tolerably sure of bringing Jerome to her own terms, and if not—well, not to make a sad subject likewise tedious, Mell, in spite of all her love for Jerome, was as much for sale as ever.

CHAPTER III.

A TOTAL ECLIPSE.

NOTHING ever turns out just as we expect.

The next day promised to be long to Mell, but before the old tall clock in the corner tolled out the hour of ten, something happened which gave to its every moment a pair of golden wings. Miss Josey Martlett, one of those ancient angels who personate youth, who endeavor to assimilate facial statistics and unfledged manners, who are interested in everything under the sun except their own business, came driving up to old man Creecy's farm. Under this lady's auspices it had been, and through her material assistance, that the sprightly little country girl had been mercifully snatched out of regions of ignorance and darkness, and maintained for a number of years at a famous boarding-school, where, among other things, she had been taught to worship the beautiful in all its forms, to cultivate the refined in all its processes, and to execrate the common and the ugly in all its manifestations. A defective curriculum—for what is more common than human frailty; what uglier than, oftentimes, duty?

Let us hasten to concede that old man Creecy has some show of reason on his side. Not all education educates. The best may furnish us with feet and hands, eyes and wings, trained members, fit implements, shields, anchorage, strongholds, and stepping-stones; but also hiding-places, weak spots, loopholes, clogs, and stumbling-blocks.

"I would stay, but I can't," protested Miss Josey, as Mell insisted upon her taking off her hat and sitting down in the most comfortable rocker in the house, while she herself sat beside her and toyed with the visitor's hand, and fanned away the heat; and then ran for a glass of fresh-butter-milk, and brought in some red peaches and blue grapes on an outlandish little Jap waiter in all colors, "just too 'cute for anything." Miss Josey was Mell's only connecting link with the country "quality," and hence appreciated in due proportion to her importance.

"I declare, Mell, you spoil me to death," simpered Miss Josey, "and nothing else in life is half so nice as being spoiled to death. But I must eat and run—must, really—I'm just so busy I hardly know which way to turn. I want you to go to a picnic with me to-morrow."

"A picnic!"

Mell's heart got into her throat at one single bound, and stuck there. Jerome had said something about a picnic.

"What picnic, Miss Josey?"

"The Grange picnic. I'm one of the lady managers, as perhaps you know, and I want you to help me with the tables. Mrs. Rutland cannot go, and there are so few to be depended on."

"You can depend on me," said Mell; "I will go with you gladly—gladly spend and be spent for you, who have been always so kind to me."

Hadn't she, though? But this was the crowning act of all Miss Josey's kindness. At this picnic she would see Jerome, and, who knows, perhaps find out his difficulties!

"You are a sweet girl, Mell," returned Miss Josey, gratified. "So grateful, in a world chock full of the basest ingratitude. I told Miss Rutland, 'Mell Creecy is the girl to take your place. She knows what to do, and she'll do it!'"

After this, Mell could scarcely follow the drift of her visitor's conversation. She was in a ferment of impatience for Miss Josey to be gone, that she might put the finishing touches to a new white dress in readiness for to-morrow's festivities. But Miss Josey, who couldn't possibly stay two short minutes when she arrived, did not get off under two mortal hours, or more. This is one of those little peculiarities of the sex, which the last one of them disavows.

Gone at last, Mell went dancing over the house and singing over her work at such a lively rate, that her father put his head in at the chamber-door wanting to know "what she was er makin' sich er fuss erbout?"

"The Grange picnic, father, tra-la-la! I'm going with Miss Josey, folderolloll!"

"Oho! Devilho gwine ter be thar, I s'pose?"

"Yes, indeed! Hail, all hail! La-la-tra-la!"

"Make him toe the mark, darter!"

Mell's song abruptly ceased.

To make an individual of Mr. Jerome Devonhough's subtle intellect and masterful will toe the mark was going to be no easy matter. He was far from being an exact science whose formula could be reduced to the touchstone of certainty. Softer were his ways, and more complex his web, the fabric of his purpose more difficult to trace, than the intricate meshes of this cob-webbery lace she was basting in the neck of her dress. Nevertheless, every stitch of her needle fastened down her gathering intentions to the figure of her mind. Jerome must have done with these evasions; he must tell her the truth, and the whole truth; he must henceforth act right up to the notch, or else she would put an end to everything between them, and in the future have nothing whatever to do with him. Several measures such as these, rightly enforced, would, she believed, bring the most slippery Lothario in existence down on his knees at a woman's feet. *If* the man really loved the woman. *If* Jerome really loved Mell.

"If, *Si, Wenn, Se!*" vociferated Mell, stamping her fiery little foot. "Why was it ever put into articulate speech?"

She knew it, this highly educated girl, in so many languages, and could not blot it out in a single one of them! Is not mere human knowledge a kind of blunt tool?

But she was ready, bright and early, the next morning, so promptly ready that Miss Josey commended her in unstinted terms.

"Had it been Clara," said Miss Josey, as Mell sprang lightly into the little basket phaeton, "she'd have kept me waiting, probably, a whole hour without a scruple of compunction! Come, we will go to the Bigge House first for some things I must carry."

To the Bigge House? The gates of Paradise were about to open for Mell. Rejoice with her, all ye who read. How will you feel when the doors of your big house are about to unclosethemselves before your long-aspiring and wistful gaze, disclosing within the risen Star of Conquest, the bright realization of many golden visions and many rose-colored dreams?

This Bigge House, of so much local fame and importance, was, in fact, a spacious mansion of no small pretention, and having been originally built for a man named Bigge, in spite of all that the present owners could do in the way of writing and calling it Rutland Manse, it remained, year after year, the Bigge House. Pleasantly situated, well-constructed, and well-kept, the house itself was surrounded by extensive and beautiful grounds, a grove, a grass plot, a flower garden embellished with trellises, terraces, fountains, rare shrubbery, and an artificial pond to row pretty little boats on, and secondly, to propagate fish. The family were of an old stock, but a newly rich—a class who like much to enjoy their money, and better still, to show it.

On this cloudless summer morn, perfect as weather goes, so perfect that one might look upon it as a Providential complicity in the booming of the Grange picnic, a gracious provision of nature to suit one special occasion, the approaches to the Bigge House presented a stirring scene. Carriages, buggies, and wagons, vehicles of every description, and vehicles nondescript, lined the roadways in every direction. Servants were rushing hither and thither, fresh arrivals coming every few moments to swell the throng, voices calling to each other in joyous recognition, fair hands waving *au revoirs*, as they dashed by, without stopping, on their way to the scene of the day's festivities. A pleasurable sense of expectation brightened every face, a buoyant sense of exhilaration quickened every heart, and high above the heads of all, a brilliant sun, regnant on a field of blue, lighted up the long sloping hills and broad green valleys. Mell looked about her wonderingly. Who were all these people, and how many of them would she know before the day was done?

Miss Josey had left her holding the reins while she ran in for a cargo of bundles. It was not at all necessary, except in Miss Josey's imagination. Her well-groomed little nag was alive, it is true, but some live things creep, and Aristophanes—called Top,—was one of them. He never thought of starting anywhere as long as he could stand still. In this respect, he differed from his mistress, who never stayed anywhere, as long as she could find enough news to keep going.

"Hold him tight, Mell," had been Miss Josey's injunction when she left Mell alone with Top.

At another time this arrangement would have greatly disappointed Mell. Her whole being had clamored to get inside the Bigge House, and, behold! here she sat along with Top outside the sacred precincts. But, somehow, her heart beat so high with rainbow-tinted fancies, she was altogether unconscious of anything amiss in the situation. If not within the very courts of the wonderful palace, the very penetralia of the Penates, she was very near the goal; nearer than she had ever been before. She could almost look in—she could almost see the shining garments and gloriously bright faces of the beings she envied, the beings who lived that life so far above her own. She had come thus far; she waited at the gate, and some day the great doors would be flung wide open for her; she would cross the threshold. But not alone. One would bear her company who was ever an honored

guest there, and in many another home of wealth and fashion and influence.

These thoughts transferred their suppressed rapture into the expression of her face—into cheeks dazzling for joy—into eyes swimming in lustre—into a mouth wreathed into curves of exquisite transport. She was beautiful.

A number of young gallants came crowding about the gate. They stood in the plentitude of checked tweeds and light flannel, with the latest sheen on a boot, and the latest paragon of a hat—mighty swells, conscious of their own superiority, eying this deuced pretty girl, and wondering who she was.

“You ought to know, Rube,” said one.

“But, I don’t!” said Rube. “I will know before I’m much older though, you can depend upon me for that! She’s with Miss Josey.”

Mell did not notice them beyond a casual glance. They had about them, incontestably, an enormous lot of style, but compared to Jerome, they were flat,—awfully flat. She caught a glimpse of him now, this swellest swell of the period, coming down the marble steps of the mansion.

Some one is with him—a lady. Yes, just as she thought, Clara Rutland. Here they come. She, so—so—almost ugly, and he, so—so—so Jerome-like. That’s the only way to express it. Jerome is more than simply handsome, more than merely graceful, more than a man among men—he’s a non-such, in a nut-shell!

But here he is, almost in speaking distance, and every step bringing him nearer. Isn’t he going to be surprised? Isn’t he going to be delighted? Isn’t he going to shake her hand and smile that impenetrable smile, and—?

How is this? Jerome has come and gone. He did not look at her—he did not once raise his eyes in passing.

Just ahead of this poky little vehicle, where Mell awaited the return of Miss Josey, stood a lordly equipage, all silver plate and shine, with a well-dressed groom standing in front of the champing, restive, mettlesome animal, as eager to be off and gone somewhere as the most restless of human hearts in a human bosom.

Into this nobby turnout Jerome assisted Miss Rutland, and then springing in himself, grasped the reins from the groom’s hands. For one awful moment (to Mell) the horse stood straight upon his hind legs, and then, obeying Jerome’s voice, who said in the quietest of tones, ‘Go on, Rhesus,’ gave one wild plunge and dashed ahead, leaving Mell with a stifled feeling, as if she was buried alive under twenty feet of volcanic ashes.

But what did it mean—his passing her without a sign of recognition? Jerome might be of a truant disposition, of unstable fancy, and superior in his own strength to most ordinary rules, but he couldn’t help knowing her face to face. There was a bare possibility that he had not really seen her; his sight, come to think of it, was none of the best, or, at least, he habitually wore an interesting little *pince-nez* dangling from his button hole, and sometimes, though not often, stuck it across the bridge of his well-shaped nose with telling effect.

With such arguments, and much wanting to be convinced. Mell recovered her equipoise to some extent, managing to hear about half Miss Josey was saying, and to answer only once or twice very wildly at random. Arrived at their destination, she assisted her patroness in receiving and arranging the baskets; this important contingent of the day’s proceedings being satisfactorily disposed of, they followed the example of the crowd at large

and strolled about in search of some amusement. A more delightful location for a day's outing it would be hard to find, the world over. On three sides of the principal grove, stretched an immense plateau, smooth as a flower-garden, and level as a plumb line, and on the fourth side a sudden, bold declivity, just as if a giant hand had pulled the clustering hills apart and left them wide asunder, laying bare the heart of a magnificent ravine. In this wild gorge were stupendous cliffs and brinks, shady shelves o'erhanging secluded and romantic nooks, enormous rocks holding plentiful treasures in moss and lichen, singularly constructed mounds, probably the remaining deposit of a prehistoric race, wild flowers in variety, wild scenery in perfection, and a beautiful stream of running water, wherein disported finny tribes in abundance. Nothing in the highest art of gardenesque could produce such results as this. A mere ramble amid such scenes of diverse picturesqueness—nature's wear and tear in moods of passion—amounts to a study of geological architecture under favoring conditions.

Mell loved nature, but not as she loved Jerome. Her brains were crammed with wild speculations in regard to him, which accounts for the fact that she had no mind on that eventful day to invest in all those wonderful manifestations of nature's power and nature's mystery.

During their circuitous meanderings, two young men joined Miss Josey and were duly presented to her *protégé*. They were fine young fellows, and very pleasant, too, but Mell continued so pre-occupied in the vain racking of her brain, trying to imagine what had become of Jerome and Clara Rutland, that she did not catch their names, and replied to their efforts at conversation with monosyllabic remarks. One of them, a merry-tempered, straightforward, stalwart young chap, armed with rod and bait, asked her, with a flattering degree of warmth, if she wouldn't go with them a-fishing; but reflecting if she did so, she would in all likelihood be out of the way of seeing Jerome for hours to come, Mell declined without circumlocution, glad to get rid of him on the pretext of having promised to assist Miss Josey in her onerous duties, as commissary of subsistence. Discouraged, the young fisherman bowed and left.

"Such a pretty girl," he remarked to his companion. "It's a pity she doesn't know what to say!"

Think of Mell Creecy not knowing what to say! The girl who was always saying things nobody else had ever thought of saying. Such is the pretty pass to which an unhappy love may bring the brightest girl! And, after all, she saw absolutely nothing of Jerome until all those wagon upon wagon loads of baskets had been ransacked, and their tempting contents emptied out upon the festive board, giving forth grateful suggestions of the coming mid-day meal.

While squeezing lemons, flushed and more than ever anxious, deft of hand, but uneasy in mind, the buggy containing Jerome and Miss Rutland dashed into the grove.

"We've been all the way to Pudney," called out the young lady, holding up to view some tied-up boxes, "and here are the prizes."

"All right," responded Miss Josey, "but do let us have the ice. The prizes are of no consequence to a famishing people, but the dinner is, and we are about ready."

"She's powerfully interested in the prizes," commented a girl at Mell's elbow, "but she has a good right to be."

"Why?" inquired Mell.

"Because she is going to be crowned queen of love and beauty."

"How do you know?"

"I've put things together, and that's the way they sum up to me. That young man with her can beat all of our boys, and he's going to crown her."

"Is he?" ejaculated Mell.

Let him dare to do it! Before Jerome Devonhough should place a victor's crown on Clara Rutland's head, she would—well, what would she do?

"*Anything!*" muttered Mell, between her teeth.

Poor Mell! She had been to such an expensive school and learned so many things, and not one of them was of the slightest use to her in this sore strait. Could there not be established a new school for girls, differing materially from the old; founded upon a more adaptable basis, taught after a hitherto unknown method, and including prominently in its curriculum of studies, that branch of knowledge whose acquisition enables a woman to bear long, to suffer in silence, and in weakness to be strong? These are the practical issues in a woman's daily life, and although in such a school she might not get her money's worth in German gutturals and French verbs, she would, at least, have indulged in a less reckless expenditure of time in obtaining useless knowledge.

But let us not blame the schools over much, and without a just discrimination. Not all the fault lies at their door. Something there is amiss among the girls themselves. It may be, that they love and hate, and talk too much, even in one language.

In a girl of Mell's temperament, love would not have been love, lacking jealousy, and its twin-feeling, revenge. More's the pity, Mell!

That picnic dinner was splendid. Everybody enjoyed it but Mell, and it was not the young fisherman's fault that she did not. Although he was in attendance upon another young lady, who seemed to know what to say, and said it incessantly, he kept an eye on Mell, and proffered her every tempting dish he could lay his hands upon. To no purpose; for Mell could not eat. She tried, and the very first mouthful paralyzed her ability to swallow. It was altogether as much as she could do to keep from sobbing aloud in the faces of all these omniverous, happy people. What made it all the worse, at breakfast time she had been happier than they—too happy, in fact, to eat, and now, here at dinner, she was too miserable.

And there sat the author of all her misery, not twelve feet distant, perfectly oblivious to her proximity, nay, her very existence. Not by any chance did he ever look toward her, or show any consciousness of her presence. So devoted and so marked were his attentions to that uninteresting and anything but attractive Clara Rutland, that Mell heard it commented upon on all sides. These two, so sufficient unto themselves, were among the first to leave the festal board and wander off in sylvan haunts. Anon, all appetites were satisfied, and amid the buzzing of tongues and boisterous flashes of merriment, the multitude again dispersed. Unobserved and in a very unenviable frame of mind, the unhappy Mell stole away to herself. The paramount desire of her wounded spirit was to get beyond the ken of human eye. In a hidden recess screened by an overhanging rock, she sat down, the prey of such discordant and chaotic thoughts as wear away, in time, the bulwarks of reason. It was yesterday, no, the day before, no, longer, that he had called upon God to witness that she alone was dear to him, she only precious in his sight, and now, how stands the case? Ah, dear God, you heard him say it! Oh, All-seeing Eye, you have looked upon him this day, and will not a lightning blast from an indignant Heaven palsy the false tongue, whose words have no more meaning than loose rubble!

Into the heaviness of these thoughts, growing heavier with access of bit-

terness as the moments sped, there came the ringing tones of a voice—a voice well known to Mell.

Shaking off her lethargy and looking out from her hiding place, she beheld the object of all these harrowing reflections, grasping Miss Rutland's two hands in his own, as they together, and laughingly, descended a precipitous declivity. Once down, they proceeded with access of laughter, to push their way through a tangle of brushwood. To get out of this into the beaten path, they must necessarily advance in the direction of her place of concealment, and, devoured with jealousy, inflamed with distrust, tortured with the cruel madness of love, Mell determined to satisfy herself on the spot, as to whether Jerome's avoidance was premeditated or unintentional. Just as the couple emerged from their nether difficulties, and stood on clear ground and firm footing, Mell suddenly stepped forth upon the same path, confronting them face to face. Miss Rutland did not speak. Mell knew she would not, although they had attended the same boarding school for years, lived in the same house, and graduated in the same class, where Miss Rutland, unlike herself, achieved no distinction of self-merit; being content to be accounted distinguished through the sepulchre of a dead father.

Mell did not expect recognition from her in such a place at such a time; for the neighboring rocks were alive with the best families in the county, and Clara was one of those feeble brained persons, who have minds suited to all purposes, save use and knowledge of that kind which may be put on and off as a movable garment. Such creatures, tossed about helplessly on the billows of circumstance, keep one finger on the public pulse, and know you, or know you not, according to its beat. For all this, Mell cared nothing in that supreme moment. One swift glance at Clara, and after that every faculty of her mind and body was centered on Jerome. He was evidently surprised at being nearly run over by this blustering and blowsy young lady, but beyond that—nothing. He looked her full in the face, the unknowing look of a total stranger. The result of this look was to Mell calamitous. A waving blankness came before her sight, her knees trembled, her strength seemed poured out like water, and staggering to a tree, she caught hold of it for support.

“Cut—cut, dead!”

This, after all that had passed between them, was simply brutal. But the despised and slighted country girl was only momentarily stunned, not crushed. Out of the throes of her wounded pride and injured affection, there burst forth the devouring flames of a fiery and passionate nature, incapable of any luke-warmness in emotion. Her eyes dilated, her fingers twitched, her face set like a flint, her lip curled in scorn, and she shook her clenched fist at Jerome's retreating figure.

“Contemptible coward! Miserable trickster! What have I ever done, that you should refuse to speak to me in the presence of Clara Rutland?”

Her bosom heaved; she sobbed aloud, and shook her fist again.

“I'll make you sorry for this! I'll get even with you, yet!” Words, whose fierce earnestness embodied a prophesy, and were followed by a prayer:

“Oh, God, only give me the power to make him feel it, and I ask no more! I care not what then befalls me!”

This paroxysm of passion swept over her as a besom of destruction, leaving her quenched as tow, white, unnerved, quite pitiful and hushed. She sank to the ground and into a state of semi-unconsciousness.

Some one coming near, some one lifting her into a sitting posture, some

one pouring cold water upon her head, and holding something to her nose aroused her.

"That's right," said the young fisherman, "open your eyes—open them wide! It's nobody but me. I wouldn't tell another soul, for I know you wouldn't want the mischief of a fuss made over it. But how did you come to pitch over?"

"I did not come to pitch over," said Mell, bewildered, "did I?"

"Of course you did! I had been looking for you for ever so long, and standing on top there, I happened to look down, and saw you lying here. And you never will know how scared I was, for, at first, I thought you were dead. Gad, didn't I make tracks, though, after I got started! But, drink a little more of this, and now, don't you feel set up again?"

"Considerably so," said Mell, trying, too, to look set up. He was so kind, and she, poor, bruised thing, so grateful. This little word, kind, so often upon the lip—upon yours and mine, and the lips of our friends, as we encounter them socially on our pilgrimage day by day, is only at certain epochs in our own lives fully understood, and deservedly cherished deep down in the heart. And yet, so few of us can be great, and so many of us could be kind if we would, and oftener than we are.

"I know just why you toppled," proceeded Mell's kind rescuer.

"But I didn't topple!" again protested Mell.

"Did you fall down on purpose?"

"No. I did not fall at all, as far as I know."

"Exactly! those are the worst kind—the falls you can't tell anything about."

So they are. Her's had not been far in space—she remembered it all now, with an acute pang—but, oh, so far in spirit!

"You could walk now a little, couldn't you?"

"I think I could," said Mell.

She got upon her feet with his assistance.

"You are shaky, yet."

"A little shaky," Mell admitted.

"Then take my arm."

She took it, as a wise being takes the inevitable all through life, submissively, and without saying much about it.

They walked slowly, and the young follower of dear old Ike watched his companion's every step, with a solicitude bordering on the fatherly.

"What do you suppose I am going to do with you, now?"

She could not imagine.

"Give you something to eat—not that only, make you eat it! I gave you enough at dinner time, if you had only eaten it, but you left all my goody-goodies untasted."

"And you unthanked," added Mell, with a ghost of her old smile, and a *soupc on* of her old sprightliness.

"No matter about that! Only, I was worried that you could not eat, and I know the reason why."

Did he? Did he know it? The girl at his side dreaded to hear his next words.

"Miss Josey had been working you to death all the morning. I saw you how you staved around and looked after everything, while Miss Josey sat on one side with her hands folded. She's good at that! She never does anything herself but reap all the glory of other people's successes. The very worst of these picnics is, that a few do all of the work, and the many all the enjoying. Now, you—you haven't had much of a time, have you?"

She had not, but no girl in her right mind is going to confess, out and out, that she hasn't had a good time, even in the Inferno.

"Rather slow, perhaps," answered Mell, putting it as mildly on a strained case, as the case would bear, "but there's nobody to blame for it, but myself. If I wasn't such a fool in some respects, I might have had a— a perfectly gorgeous time. *You* would have given me all the good time a girl need to look for."

"But you wouldn't let me!"

"Well, you see," explained Mell, warming with her subject, "I had promised Miss Josey—"

"Never promise her anything again!"

"I don't think I will! But, as I was saying, I promised her to come and take Miss Rutland's place—to come for that very purpose, and when I make a promise, however hard, I'm going to keep it."

"Bravo for you! Not every girl does that."

"Every high-principled girl does." Her tones were severely uncompromising.

"*Ought to*, you mean," rejoined her companion, with an incredulous laugh.

"No—*does!*"

Light words, lightly spoken, lightly gone! Alas! How these bubbles of talk, subtle as air, come back home after a time, to twit us with scorn, to taunt us with falsity, to impute wrong unto us, to arraign, to accuse, to denounce, to condemn out of our own lips.

"Here we are," said Mell's companion, still laughing at the idea of a young woman thinking it necessary to hold tight to her word. "Here we are. Now sit right down here and rest your head comfortably against this tree. I'll be back in a twinkling."

So he was, with a plate in his hand filled with edibles, and a bottle of sparkling wine.

"Eat," commanded this eminently practical young man; "eat and drink. That's all you need now to fetch you round completely."

This settled the question, and settled it most judiciously and satisfactorily. The solid food proved a balm of comfort to that desolate goneness within her, which Mell had wrongly ascribed as due entirely to the volcanic derangement of her heart; and the strong wine sped through her veins a draught of health, a cordial to the mind, a rosy elixir of life.

Mell began to take some interest in her companion and her present surroundings. She recognized in them a certain claim to her consideration, and a certain charm. This young stranger was a gentleman in looks and bearing; he had some manliness in his nature, nevertheless, (Mell felt down on gentlemen) and a heart as brimming full of charity as St. Vincent de Paul, himself. He was not ashamed among all his fine friends, to speak to a simple country girl, who, destitute of fortune, had nothing to commend her but innate modesty and God-given beauty. So far from being ashamed, he was ministering to her wants as no one had ever ministered to them before—as kindly and courteously as if she were in every respect his equal in social standing. Jerome would not speak to her, and this gentleman, in her weakness, held the cup to her lips, and put the food into her mouth with his own hands.

"I'll pray for him this very night," thought Mell, and moistened the thought with a grateful tear.

But, long before the edibles were consumed, every vestige of a tear had disappeared from Mell's eyes, and she was talking back to this pattern of

a gentleman, as few girls of her age knew so well how to do. The blood rushed back to her pallid cheeks, witchery to her tongue, magic to her glance.

"Don't be offended," she remarked to him, with enchanting candor, after they had become the best of friends; "but I did not hear your name this morning, and I have not the slightest idea who you are."

"Have you the slightest desire to know?"

"Indeed I have! You can't imagine—the very greatest desire!"

"Then let me refresh your memory somewhat. Do you recall a pug-nosed, freckle-faced, bull-headed youngster, who used to pommel Jim Green into blue jelly, every time he wanted to lift you over the swollen creek or carry your school-bag, or—"

"I do; I remember him well. But you—you are not Rube Rutland?"

"Then I wish you'd tell me who I am! I've been thinking I was Rube Rutland for a good many years now—for I am older than I look."

"And to think I did not know you!" exclaimed Mell.

"And to think I did not know *you*!" exclaimed Rube. "That's what gets me! I was asking everybody and in all directions who that stunning girl was, with—"

"Well," inquired Mell, laughing, "with *what*? I'd like to know what is stunning about me."

"With the sweetest face I ever looked into."

This reply caused Mell's eyes, intently fixed upon the speaker, to drop with rare grace to meet the maiden's blush upon her cheek. A perfectly natural action, it was for that reason and others, a very effective one.

"When I found out who you were," pursued Rube, studying the face he had praised, seeing it glorified by his praises, "I fairly froze to Miss Josey, wanting so much to renew our acquaintance, and when you had no word of welcome for an old friend, and gave me the cold shoulder with such a vengeance, I was cut all to pieces over it. Fact! I couldn't enjoy fishing, and I feel bad yet!"

"You might have known I did not recognize you," said Mell, lifting her eyes. "I cannot tell you how glad I am, Mr. Rutland."

"*Mr. Rutland*! It used to Rube."

"And shall be Rube again, if you so desire! Rube, I am just delighted that you've come back home!"

CHAPTER IV.

EVEN.

So far, she had dallied innocently enough with her old playfellow; neither seeking to please nor deceive, spreading no nets of enchantment, nicely baited, to entrap the fancy of this agreeable young man (rich too), who was as frank in nature and as transparent in purpose, as physically muscular and daring.

At three o'clock, Miss Josey came to sound the horn for the races, and the crowd came surging back. Old and young, big and little, the cream of the county and its yeomanry, a congregation of the mass, a segregation of the cliques, mounting high into the hundreds. The order of the Grange was then at the zenith of its fame and power.

The crowd, as we have said, came surging back. The best of the fun was yet to come. Mell roused herself and looked about her. Here were other girls with sweet faces, and many of them, as she was aware, possessed

of those heavier charms of worldly substance which oftentimes outweigh the sweetest of faces. None of them must lure him from her. He should stick to her, now, come what would. The careless beauty, the ingenuous and undesigning woman, is immediately transformed into a greedy monopolist, a wily fox, a cunning serpent, a contriving, intriguing, manœuvring strategist, bent upon mischief, who will play a deep game and stoop to the tricks of the trade, and shift, and dodge, and shuffle, and aim to bring down, by fair means or foul, the noble quarry.

Eye, lip, tongue, mind, heart, soul, the graces of youth, the allurements of beauty, the treasures of a cultivated mind, and all those sweet mysteries of sense which float in the atmosphere between a young man and the maiden of his fancy, were put in motion to bear upon Rube's case.

He did not move ; no wonder ; gorged on sweets, Rube had neither power nor inclination to be gone.

After a little, a group of young men stationed themselves at a given point, not far from where this couple sat. They had been into an adjacent farmhouse and changed their clothes, and now appeared in knee pants, red stockings, and white jackets, a striking and interesting accessory to an already animated and glowing landscape. In this group of picturesque figures Jerome was conspicuous. Jerome looked well in anything, and generally well to everybody.

Not so, to-day.

To one pair of eyes, not distant, he now loomed up blacker in broad daylight than the blackest Mephistopheles in a howling Walpurgis night.

He saw Rube beside her, and she noted his start of surprise.

"Have a care!" cogitated Mell. "There may be surprises in store for you—greater than this and not so easily brooked."

She turned her back upon him and gave her whole attention again to Rube. The first duty of a woman is to respect herself, the second duty of a woman is to enforce the respect of others. Some of these days Jerome Devonhough would be only too glad if she would deign to permit him to speak to her.

"Aren't you going to take part?" she asked her companion.

"No ; I'm not in trim, and it's no use trying to beat Devonhough."

"You could beat him," said she. She spoke with confidence and seductively.

"You are awfully complimentary, I declare ! Do you wish me to run, Melville?"

"I do. Yes, Rube, I wish it particularly. Why should this stranger carry off the palm over our own boys?"

"For the best of reasons. He deserves to carry it off. Devonhough can out-run, out-leap, out-ride, out-do anything in the county."

"Except *you*," again insinuated Mell.

"Say! what makes you believe so strong in me?"

"Nothing makes me, but—I cannot help it!"

At this point, dear reader, if you are a man, and happily neither blind, nor deaf, nor over eighty years of age, take Rube's seat for a moment, at Mell's feet. Let her tell you in the sweetest tones, that she cannot help believing in you strong—let her bend upon you a glance sweeter than the tones, stronger than the words, and then say, honestly, don't you feel, as Rube did at this juncture, mighty queer?

Under the spell, her victim stirred—he lifted himself slowly toward her, inquiring in a low voice, but with intense energy :

"Melville, are you fooling me?"

"Fooling you!" she ejaculated, in soft reproach. "Would I fool you, Rube? Is that your opinion of *me*? You think, then—but tell me, Rube, why do you think so?—that those early days are less dear to me than to you—their memory less sweet?"

"I have thought so," murmured he in great agitation, "because I have not dared to think otherwise—*until now*."

And into his great soul there entered, then and there, the ineffable beatitude of the true believer.

Oh, wicked, wicked Mell! One little hour ago, and you had forgotten his very existence! Is the Recording Angel, who stands above your head up there, off duty, that you should dare to do it? Or, will it help your case in the day of reckoning, that deception foul as this, has been raised by clever women into the dignity of a fine art, and goes on among them all the while, as inexpugnable as an Act of Congress?

"Melville, I will run this race—run it to please you."

"I knew you would! And believe me, Rube, nothing could please me more."

"Suppose I should win," said Rube, "what then?"

"You will be the hero of the day, and—" Mell halted very prettily, but finally brought it out in sweet confusion, "and maybe *I* would wear a crown."

"By my troth, you shall! But what of me? I take no stock in crowns like that. If I should win, Mell, may I name my own reward?"

"You may."

"It will be a big one."

"The man who runs and wins generally gets a big one."

"But understand my meaning, Mell, understand it perfectly. I do not want the shadow of a doubt to rest upon this matter. Who shall decide when lovers disagree?"

He had been toying with a twig broken from a flowering bay; it was stripped of foliage, save a few green leaves at the end, and with this he lightly touched the dimpled hand reposing upon her lap.

"*That* is what I would ask. Will you give it to me, Mell, if I win the race?"

Mell trembled violently, but she said "yes."

That was natural enough. When a woman says yes, it is time to tremble. Even Rube knew that.

"You mean it? It a solemn promise! One of those promises you always keep!"

Again Mell trembled violently—worse than before, and again said "yes."

That barely audible yes, had scarcely died upon her white lips when Rube sprang to his feet, and casting off his fawn colored flannel jacket and light waist-coat, tossed them in a careless heap upon the ground at her feet. Divested of those outer garments, the symmetrical curves of his young manhood, and the irregular curves of his honest face showed up to great advantage in white linen and a necktie—the latter a very *chic* article of its kind, consisting of blazoned monstrosities of art, in bright vermillion on a background of white—blood on snow.

"You must excuse my shirt-sleeves," said Rube, during the process of disrobing. "I have no costume, so must do the best I can under the circumstances."

He next made off with his suspenders, and began tugging at his shirt in an alarming fashion.

"What are you going to do?" interrogated Mell, with a horrified expression. "You are not going to—"

"No," said Rube, laughing, and coloring too. "I'm not going to take it off. I'm only going to—" tugging all the while—"make myself into a sailor boy, or flowing Turk, or a loose Brave, or a something or other, to keep pace with those brocaded Templars, Hospitallers, and Knights of the Golden Fleece over there. Come, now, can't you fix a fellow up?"

"Fix a fellow up?" echoed Mell, helplessly. She never had 'fixed a fellow up,' and she knew less about it than the sacred writings of Zoroaster.

"Yes," said Rube. "Give me those ribbons you've got on—fix me up, put your colors on me, don't you see?"

Mell did see at last, and greatly relieved, proceeded to do his bidding. The sash from her own supple waist was deftly transferred to his, and a knot of ribbons at her throat, after many trials, was finally disposed of to their mutual liking.

"Now, don't I look as well as any of 'em?" inquired the improvised knight, quite carried away with the fixing-up process.

"As well, and better," she assured him.

"Well, then," he held out his hand to her, "let us seal the compact. If I win, Melville——"

"Yes," said Mell, hurriedly.

"But if I fail."

"You *cannot* fail, not if you love me!" She spoke impatiently, and with flashing eyes. "A one-legged man could not, if he loved me! Love finds a way, and love which cannot find a way is not love."

"Enough," said Rube, below his breath. "You will know whether I love you or not."

Their hands were still clasped together in bond, until, perceiving they had become a subject of curiosity to those about them, Rube at length allowed Mell to withdraw hers, whereupon he turned off with a light laugh; that proficuous little laugh, which amid life's thick-coming anxieties, great and small, serves so many turns, and turns so many ways, and covers up within us so much that is no laughing matter.

Rube laughed and mingled with the crowd.

"Come out of that!" shouted an urchin. It was the signal for a regular broadside of raillery and chaff from the pestiferous small boy, a many-tongued volume out of print, and circulating in open space at the rate of a thousand editions to the minute.

Nothing abashed, amid groans and jeers, and gibes, and hoots, Rube took his place with the others, the only make-shift knight among them.

"For pity's sake, look at Rube," exclaimed Miss Rutland, "actually in his shirt sleeves? Rube, don't! You are not in costume, and you spoil the artistic effect."

"Look sharp," came Rube's laughing reply, "or I'll spoil the artistic result, also."

"Don't get excited over the prospect," commented Jerome, nodding his head reassuringly at Miss Rutland, "there's not the remotest cause for alarm."

Miss Rutland sat on a tub turned bottom side up, which had served its purposes in lemonade. Jerome took his ease on a wagon-body, also turned bottom side up, which had served its purposes as a table. Such are the phases of a picnic—and one picnic has more phases than all of Jupiter's moons.

"The tortoise," pursued Jerome, now turning his attention more partic-

ularly to Rube, "is a remarkable animal, but like thee, oh friend of my soul, 'thou drone, thou snail, thou slug,' not much on a run. How much is it I can beat thee, Rube, every time and without trying—three lengths?"

"Just you keep quiet," retorted Rube. "The man so sure, let him look to himself; the man who blows, let him beware! In all our trials at speed there never was before anything to win, and I'm a fellow who can't run to beat where there's nothing to win."

"A tremendous issue is involved on the present occasion," announced Jerome in withering scorn. "A lot of paper flowers strung on a piece of wire to stick on a girl's head, and when it's all over and done, I don't know who feels most idiotic or repentent, the girl who wears 'em or the fellow who won 'em. I've been there! I know. I hope a more enduring crown than this perishable travesty will fall to my lot!"

"So do I!" prayed Rube aloud, and with devoutness.

"Oh, Rutland, Rutland!" exclaimed his friend, going off into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. "There isn't anything in this wide world half so deliciously transparent as your intentions, unless—unless," subjoined Jerome, as soon as he could again command his voice, "unless it be Miss Josey's juvenality."

"Hush laughing," said Rube, drawing near and speaking low. "See here, Devonhough, you don't care the snap of your finger about this affair; you've said as much; so hold back, dear old fellow, won't you? Give me a chance!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Jerome, again going off. "'Dear old fellow.' That's rich! Very dear old fellow, never so dear before!"

"Oh, go along with you," responded Rube crossly. "Go to the devil until you can stop laughing!"

He was about to turn off in high dudgeon, when Jerome with an effort pulled himself together and soberly considered the subject. "Hold on, then! I'd like to oblige you Rutland, of course I would, but there's Clara! She expects me to—"

"Hang Clara!" said Rube, with the natural unfraternalness of a brother.

"That's what I propose to do," answered Jerome. "Hang her with a wreath!"

"Don't!" again pleaded Rube. "Not this time. If you just won't, I'll—"

"Rub-a-dub-dub!" beat the drum.

"Into place!" shouted a stentorian voice.

"Ready?"

"One—two—Boom!"

They were off in fine style, Jerome quickly showing the lead, and Rube gaining gradually upon him towards the middle of the course. To one spectator it was more interesting than the sword-dance, more exciting than a steeple-chase. But the eager spectators at the starting place could see very little beyond a certain point, owing to the crowd of boys and men which lined the sides of the track and closed up as the runners passed. They could hear vociferous yelling and screaming, sometimes the outcry, "Devonhough ahead!" and then, again, "Hurrah for Rutland!" and, at the last, a tremendous whooping and cheering and clapping of hands, in which no name was at first distinguishable. Then, amid the unbounded enthusiasm of the multitude, the victor was lifted above the heads of the crowd and brought back in triumph.

Mell had scarcely moved from the spot where Rube left her. She had

had some time for reflection, and had profited by it, to such an extent, that she now felt quite miserable. That was the way with Mell, and continues to be the way with Mell's kind. They make a practice of hitching together the cart of Unthought and the sure-footed beast Think-twice; the cart in front, the horse in the rear; and if, under such circumstances the poor brute, nine times out of ten, lands his living freight into very hot water, too hot for their tender feelings, who is to blame for it?

Some very strange thoughts coursed through the girl's mind. Now, suppose it was Rube seated up there on the heads of an idolizing populace, and it became incumbent upon her to fulfill that promise so rashly and foolishly given, could she do it? No! No! She would rather live a thousand years and scratch an old maid's head every hour in all those years, than marry Rube Rutland!

It made her sick to think about it; every nerve in her body recoiled; every good instinct within her lifted up a dissentient voice.

"Can't you see who it is?" She inquired hoarsely of her nearest neighbor, a much be-banged girl, who peered above the crowd from the top of a dry-goods box, with the cute expression of a fluffy-faced puppy, "Can't you see?"

"Not distinctly yet, but I think it is that young stranger, Rube Rutland's friend; I'm pretty sure it is."

"Thank God!" muttered Mell. She was ambitious, but she was not yet the hardened thing that ambition makes.

"My goodness!" suddenly exclaimed the girl on the box. "It isn't that strange young man! It is Rube Rutland! I can see him distinctly now. Oh, how glad I am! It is Rube Rutland, boys." "Rutland forever!" shouted back the boys.

In all that big crowd there was but one heart not glad. Rube was in the house of his friends, the other a stranger. County pride, State pride, local prejudice, all sided with Rube. Jerome was an alien. He had come there to beat "our boys," and one of our boys had beaten him. Huzza! Huzza! Shout the victory!

They did shout it with a noise whose loudness was enough to bring down the roof of heaven. Never had there been such a victory at a Grange picnic before.

Deafened by the noise Mell slunk back into the wood. All color forsook her face once more. She had played for high stakes, this ambitious girl; she had won her game, and in the winning cursed her own folly and realized with a pang of unspeakable bitterness, that a victory for which one pays too dear a price is the worst kind of defeat.

Released from the well-meant persecutions of his many admirers, Rube asked for his coat and things, and a fan, and was next subjected to a statement from the master of ceremonies.

"With this wreath," explained that individual, "you may crown the lady of your choice, crown her queen of Love and Beauty, and it will be her prerogative to award the other prizes won on this occasion. Who is the fortunate lady?"

Every woman in hearing distance held her breath, every man opened wide his ears.

"Miss Mellville Creecy."

"Whom did he say?" queried Miss Josey, tremendously excited and not quite certain she had heard aright. Miss Josey was nibbling at a peach; she nibbled no more. Though blessed with an excellent appetite, Miss

Josey in her hungriest moment was more eager to hear something new than eat something nice.

"Did you say Mell, Rube?"

"I did," said Rube.

It struck the crowd speechless. What? Rube Rutland, the son of an ex-Governor, an ex-Judge, an ex-Senator, dead now, but dead with all his titles on him; Rube Rutland, the greatest catch in the State, going to crown Mellville Creecy, daughter of that old ignoramus who made "fritters" of the King's English, and dug potatoes, and hoed corn, and ploughed in the fields with his own hands? The thing was preposterous! It was a thing, too, to be resented by his friends and equals.

Miss Rutland drew her brother aside.

"Rube, you cannot mean it! You surely have some sense! A little, if not much! You can't crown that obscure girl with the cream of the county, your own personal friends, all around you."

"Can't I?" said Rube. "I can and *will*! The cream of the county may go to—anywhere." Rube closed up blandly: "I will not limit them in their choice of locations. That would be not only ungenerous but ungentlemanly."

"Rube," persisted Miss Rutland, "do listen to reason. What will mother say? What will everybody say?"

"Say what they darned please!"

Rube was first of all a freeborn American—secondly, an aristocrat.

"What's the use of being somebody if you've got to knuckle down to what people say?"

"But you are not obliged to crown anybody," insinuated Clara. "Rather than crown this low-born girl, make some one your proxy. Jerome would—"

"Oh, I have no doubt, with pleasure! You are a deep one, Clara, but you'll wear no crown this day. Might as well give it up."

So she perceived, and turned off in a rage, first informing him that he always had been, and always would be an unconscionable ass.

"You have fully decided, then?" questioned the master of ceremonies. "I have," Rube told him, beginning to get put out. Pretty Mell might well have been a scare-crow, such consternation had she created amongst them all. "I decided some time ago. Will it be necessary for me to mount a tree-top and blow a clarion blast before I can make you all understand that I am going to crown Mellville Creecy, and nobody else?"

"Certainly not, certainly not," hastily replied the master of ceremonies. He too was disappointed; he had a sister. Was there ever a man in power who didn't have a sister?—who didn't have a good many, all wanting crowns?

"Will you make a speech?"

"Nary speech," declared Rube, laughing. "I'm not so swift in my tongue as my legs! See here, Cap'n, there's no occasion for an unnecessary amount of tomfoolery about this thing. Some gentleman bring Miss Creecy forward. I'll put this gewgaw on her in a jiffy, and that'll be the end of it!"

Rube smiled softly to himself. That was very far from being the end of it.

"Mell! Mell!" screamed Miss Josie, running up to her *protegé*, the bearer of astonishing news, "you don't know what's going to happen! You'd never guess it! Rube is going to crown you, my pretty darling! You are to be queen of Love and Beauty."

"But, I'd rather not," said Mell, drawing back.

"Rather not?" screamed Miss Josey. "Did anybody ever before hear of a woman who would rather not be a queen—a queen in the hearts of men?"

"I don't see how you can help it," continued Miss Josey. Mell did not, either, alas! "But I don't wonder you feel a little frightened about it. It's such a wonderful thing for Rube to do; but Rube has two eyes in his head, Rube has, and knows the prettiest girl in the county when he sees her! This thing is going to be the making of you, Mell (rather say the undoing, Miss Josey) so don't be so frightened, but hold your head high, and bear your honors bravely, and remember all eyes are upon you. The rest of the girls are fairly dying with envy, don't forget that!"

This last remark brought Mell to her senses. Not one of them but would gladly stand where she stood—gladly put themselves in her shoes if they could. Rube was not a mate, as mating goes, to be met with every day in the year. The sugared point of this timely suggestion served Miss Josey's purpose effectually. It stilled the wild throbbing in the girl's heart, brought the blood back to her face, and turned the purple of such wondrous hue in her eyes, to the softest black; with intensity of gratification, Jerome himself was forgotten for the nonce.

Miss Josey, still in a flutter of delight, now proceeded to put on her sash, to replace the knot of ribbons at her throat, to pass her hands assuagingly across Mell's wilderness of frolicsome hair, and to put an extra touch or two to her simple toilette generally; whispering words of stimulation and encouragement all the while.

Thoroughly put to rights, Miss Josey placed the girl's hand into that of a very grand personage—the president of the Grange, in fact—who led her gallantly to the spot selected for the coronation ceremonies. There stood the hero of the day. He advanced a step or two as she drew near, he bowed low, and then in a distinct voice with a somewhat heightened color, but in his usual simple, straightforward manner, said: "Miss Creecy, I beg you will do me the honor to accept this trophy of my victory."

Miss Creecy silently bowed her head; he placed the wreath upon it, and lo! what has become of our rustic maiden? She is a Queen!

Nevertheless, she immediately fell back again into Miss Josey's hands, who hastened to push the crown this way and then that,—forward a little, and then backward a little—just one barley-corn this side and just one the other; until the magical spot of perfect-becomingness having been reached, she wisely let it be. As soon as the crowd caught sight of this bright splendor of yellow hair, surmounted by a wreath of flowers, the shouting and yelling re-commenced; and when it was passed with electric swiftness from mouth to mouth, that the head of the Rutland family, the owner of an honored name and a big estate, had chosen for his queen, not the daughter of a rich planter or a great statesman, but a child of the yeomanry, a ripple of intense excitement flashed through the multitude, and enthusiasm knew no bounds.

"Rutland for the people, and the people for Rutland!" was the joyous outpouring of the common heart. A sentiment which only subsided occasionally, to be renewed with increased vigor and manifold cheers.

"I see your game," said the secretary of the Grange to Rube, with a sly wink. "You are going to run for the Legislature?"

"Your penetration surprises me," returned Rube with a laugh. "What a pity the voting couldn't be done now; I'd be willing to risk a couple of thousand on my own election, if it could!"

"It's awfully becoming to her, isn't it?" inquired Jerome, speaking to Clara, and referring to the crown which sat upon the queen's head.

"I don't think so," returned Clara, "not in the least becoming. It doesn't suit the color of her hair."

"Sure enough! I had forgotten that. We bought it to suit yours, didn't we? It is too bad! but never mind; we'll come in for the second prize, certain."

"Not I!" exclaimed Clara, with a toss of her head. "It is first or none with me. There is something mean, little, contemptible, about a second prize, just like all second-rate things! Having failed in securing the first, were I in your place, I would not try for the second."

And she left him, much angered.

"Whew!" softly whistled Jerome. "It strikes me that what pleases one woman, doesn't please another. Why is that? It also strikes me that it's no use trying to please any of 'em. A man can't; not unless he converts himself into a sort of synchronous multiplex machine, and tries seventy-five different ways all at once."

The stream of people now poured in one direction,—towards royalty. Queens differ; but there is something about every one of them which fetches the crowd. While this one stood hemmed in on all sides, an object of curiosity to all classes and conditions, all eager for a sight of her, some eager to be made known to her, others wanting to catch a look, a word, a smile, Mell heard some one at her elbow say, softly:

"Mellville."

Turning, she confronted Jerome. In a flash, her whole appearance changed. The moment before she had been a gracious sovereign, accepting with queenly grace the homage of her loyal subjects. Now, she was an outraged monarch jealous of her rank, standing on her dignity.

"How dare you, sir!" asked Mell, eyeing him haughtily and drawing herself up to her fullest height. "How dare you to speak to me! How dare you touch me! I have not the honor of your acquaintance, sir!"

Jerome was undeniably astonished; but this was not the time, not the place to indulge in a feeling of astonishment, or to make an exhibition of himself or her.

"Your Majesty," said Jerome, with his characteristic coolness, "will graciously pardon me. The crowd is great, it pressed heavily upon all sides and I have not been able to resist it."

He fell back at once, and Mell bowed, just as if nothing had happened, to the gentleman, whom the master of ceremonies was in the act of introducing to her.

In the crush, Jerome encountered Rube. He had been called off on some matter under discussion among those running the shebang—Rube's way of putting it—and was now endeavoring to push his way back to Mell.

"How—do, old fellow?" said Jerome, by way of congratulation.

"Tip-top!" said Rube, by way of thanks, and seizing his friend's hand he wrung it as if his intention was to wring it clean off. "You're a trump!"

"Don't mention it!" begged Jerome. He began to laugh again. For some reason the whole thing was excessively amusing to Jerome.

"But I *will* mention it," persisted Rube. "I'll thank you for it to my dying day. It was so self-sacrificing on your part, considering everything."

"Oh, was it?" exclaimed his companion, choking down his risibles. "Well—ah—I don't exactly feel it that way. A mere trifle."

"Not to me," declared Rube.

"Perhaps not to me, either," conceded Jerome, looking on the subject more seriously. "For Clara—"

"You can patch up Clara," Rube suggested, soothingly.

"Do you think so? It's a rankling *casus belli* at present, I can tell you! But how about your rustic beauty, eh, Rube? Is she pleased? Does she like it?"

"Pleased? Like it? You bet she does! She's delighted!"

"No one has introduced me yet," Jerome next remarked, quite incidentally. "And I am sure if her Gracious Majesty smiles upon any of her loyal subjects it ought to be me."

"That's so! So come right along now." They reached her side.

"Mell, here's the very best fellow in the world," said Rube, out of the fullness of his heart, forgetting the prescribed forms of etiquette in the absorption of warm feeling.

Mell had noted their approach. She was not taken unawares. She bent her head slightly to the newcomer, she looked him over for a whole minute, it seemed, before she opened her lips and said:

"How do you do, Mr. Very-Best-Fellow-in-the-World?"

Those near enough to hear roared with laughter, for the young queen's manner made the whole thing so absurdly funny; and perhaps there is nothing a crowd so much enjoys as the taking down of a person whom they regard in the light of one much needing to be taken down.

"His name is Devonhough," Rube hastened to explain, not relishing the laugh against his friend at this particular time by his particular fault.

"Mr. Devonhough, Miss Creecy. He is my very best friend, Mell. Shake hands with him."

Mell did so; but without the faintest glimmering of a smile, and with such glacial dignity as fairly charged the atmosphere with iciness. Not content with this, she met all his subsequent efforts to cultivate her acquaintance with the briefest and chilliest repulses.

Rube was much concerned. He saw dimly that his best friend had not, somehow, made a favorable impression upon his future wife; but he could not tell the why or wherefore. While he wondered within him what he could do to put things on a pleasanter footing between them, someone else demanded his attention.

"See here," said Jerome, as soon as Rube's back was turned. "I hope you now consider me sufficiently punished. I hope you feel even. I hope you won't treat me to any more state airs. I am tired of them. Your Majesty, let me tell you something. Mark well my words. It is to me, not Rube, you owe your present exaltation."

"To you!"

The unsmiling countenance now broke into a ripple of scorn.

"What a ridiculous thing for you to say!"

"The whole thing has been ridiculous," said Jerome. "I never in my whole life ever enjoyed anything so much. 'Tis the one grain of truth which gives point to the ridiculous. Think of Rube, dear fellow, so anxious to crown you, knowing nothing, suspecting nothing, begging me not to run fast, and I, so ten thousand times more anxious than he could possibly be, to have you crowned."

"You?"

"Yes. *Me!* Don't you know, in your heart, Mellville, that I wanted you crowned?"

"No, I know nothing of the kind! When a man wants a thing done, he does it with his own hand; when he does not want it done, or cares not

much about it, he does it with another man's hand. Had you been anxious you would not have left it to Rube."

"But with that wreath in my own hand, Mell, I was morally bound to put it upon another head."

"Ah, indeed! Why?"

Jerome did not answer immediately. When he did, it was with averted eyes, and with some impatience, and not in reply to her first question at all, but her quick repetition of his own words, "Morally bound, eh?"

"Yes, Melville. You forget I am a guest in her mother's house."

"I do not forget it! I remember it every hour in the whole twenty-four; but does that make it incumbent upon you to ignore me? Jerome, look me in the face. What is Clara Rutland to you?"

"Nothing!" exclaimed he, savagely, between compressed lips. "Less than nothing! A hundred times to-day I have wished her at the bottom of—"

"There! No use to send her there *now*. It's too late!"

The knowledge of what she had done, the wretchedness she saw it was destined to entail upon her, all this while couchant like a wild beast within her, now uprose into her expressive features. Jerome was struck with it.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You will know soon enough," she responded.

He stooped to pick up the handkerchief she had dropped, and in restoring it, his hand, so cool and steady, came in contact with hers, so hot and tremulous; it touched and lingered, lingered long, and clung in a tender pressure; while a voice so low and firm, a voice, oh! so faint and sweet, stole its way into her ear, murmuring but one word, one little, fond word, which moved her in the strangest way, which thrilled, yet soothed her. Cooler than snow it fell upon her burning cheeks, warmer than a sunbeam into her freezing heart. That little game with Rube passed out of her memory.

But looking up all too soon, she saw him. He smiled upon her. He was glad to see that she and Devonhough were getting along quite pleasantly.

"I wish you would go away!" she suddenly exclaimed, turning upon her companion rudely. "Go back to Clara Rutland! You have no business here! I do not believe a word you have said to me! I yet fail to comprehend why a man may not be the master of his own actions."

"Heigh-ho!" sighed Jerome. "Just so it is in life. Just as a man begins to think he has put everything in order, and settled the question, here comes chaos again. You do not understand that, Mell? Well, I will tell you. Every man has a master—circumstance. On my side, I am surprised that you, with all your quickness of apprehension, have not been able to see clearer and deeper into this subject. You ought to have known, you must have felt that I had some good reason for acting towards you as I have to-day. Have you been true to your promise to trust me—and trust me blindly? I fear not. You have been cruelly angry with me ever since this morning, when I dared not speak."

"And why was it that you dared not speak?" demanded Mell, her lip curling contemptuously, but with a tremolo movement in her voice. "Does it then require some courage for a man, in your position to speak to a poor girl like me? Rube does not think so."

"With Rube it is different."

"It is, very different. There is no false pride about Rube."

"And I hope there is none about me. But, Mell, you do not in the least understand my position."

"I know as much about it as I care to know. Henceforth, Mr. Devonhough, let us be strangers."

"We can never be strangers," said Jerome. He was growing earnest; he spoke very low and with that rapidity of utterance which accompanies excited feelings. "This no time nor place, Mell, for such an explanation; but here, and now, I will make it. I cannot longer exist under the ban of your displeasure. Know then, dear, that I would not speak to you this morning for your own sweet sake—not mine. I was driven to it to protect your good name, and keep you out of the mouths of those shallow-pated creatures, who have nothing else to talk about but other people's failings. Had Clara Rutland once seen me speak to you—had she for one moment suspected the least acquaintance between us, that hydra-headed monster, Curiosity, would have lifted its unpitying voice in a hundred awkward questions: 'How did you come to know Mell Creecy? Where did you meet her? Who introduced you to her?' And so on to the end of a long chapter. I did not wish to say, for your sake, that I had never met you anywhere but in a cornfield. I did not wish to say, for your sake, that we had become acquainted in a very delightful, but by no means conventional, manner. I have thought it best, all along, to keep the fact of our acquaintance in the background, until we were brought together in some way perfectly legitimate and customary. Always for your sake, dear, not mine. Now you know in part; to-morrow I will make a clean breast of all my difficulties; so disperse these clouds, and give me one sweet look ere I go."

Instead of that, Mell swallowed a lump in her throat which felt as big as her head. She studiously avoided, for the rest of the day, any further speech with Jerome. His explanation was plausible enough on its face; but Mell was in no condition of mind to draw conclusions which might stand the test of reason, or be satisfactorily demonstrated on geometrical principles; and nothing that Jerome could say was now calculated to act as a sedative on Mell's nerves. She kept whispering to herself, "He feels it, yes, he feels it;" and thus nourished the firmness and the bravado necessary to her in the further requirements of her high position. She needed it all, and more, when it came to bestowing upon Jerome a handsome pair of spurs, as the second prize of the day. Certainly he cared for her, or why this glow on his clear-cut face, or why this light in his speaking eyes now bent upon her. Mell turned her head quickly.

"I can't understand why you don't like Devonhough," Rube remarked, noticing the movement. "I think it odd. He carries things with a high hand among the girls, I can tell you. Most all of 'em are dead in love with him."

"And do you wish me added to the list?" interrogated Mell, finding herself in a tight place, and hardly knowing how to get out of it.

"Well, no; I don't!" laughed Rube, much appreciating the sly humor of the question.

By seven o'clock the day's festivities were concluded; and then ensued a melting of all hostile elements into a homogeneous mass, all ravenous after iced-lemonade and home-made cake, and a heterogeneous devouring of the same; after which, the crowd, well pleased, but pretty well fagged out, turned their faces homeward, under a sun still shining, but shorn of its hottest beams.

No one will gainsay the statement that our heroine has made great social strides in one summer's day. In the morning a simple country girl poor in pocket, humble in rank, unknown in society, seated beside M. Josey in the little pony phaeton, full of fair hopes and inspirations;

the evening the affianced wife of the best-born and most eligible young man in the county; returning to the old farm-house in grand style, leaning back on soft cushions, beside her future lord, in a flashy open carriage drawn by a ravishing pair of high mettled roans.

Ambitious, indeed, must be that girl not satisfied with this wonderful result of one single operation in matrimonial stocks. And yet Mell is not happy. She forgets to give heed to what Rube is saying; she forgets almost to answer him back; so full of regret is she for her own lost self. She had had a thousand longings to get out of her old self, and out of her old life, and now, on the threshold of a new existence, Mell finds herself with only one desire—just to get back where she came from. If only she could—oh! if only she could, most gladly would this lately crowned queen have relinquished the glories of empire, the spoils of captive hearts, the trophies of social triumphs, the high emprise of a brilliant future, only to be simple Mell once more.

Ah, poor Mell! Not for sale now. Sold!

CHAPTER V.

PLAYERS ON A STAGE.

Now, then, here is Thursday. Jerome had said: "You will be on hand without fail, Mell; and so will I, and so will something else."

"But that something else," moaned the hapless Mell, bowed down and heart-stricken, "will never be on hand again in the meadow for me, nor anywhere else."

Saddest of all, she had herself laid the axe to the root of her own happiness; she had baited her own hook and caught a big fish; she had provoked her own doom, and herself sealed it.

Rube was not to blame.

And Jerome—he had made out a good case. Had he loved her less he would, perhaps, have acted differently.

She had digged a pitfall for her own occupation; and of all comfortless and stony places, such pitfalls as this make the hardest lying.

Out in the narrow hall, on its own particular peg, hung Mell's white sun-bonnet. She took it down and put it on her head, and walked slowly to the top of the hill. With no intention of going to the meadow herself, her feelings demanded that she should find out if Jerome was there.

He was, strolling moodily to and fro, in deep thought.

He knows now. Rube has told him. He despises her to-day, and yesterday he had loved her. Look at him down there in the meadow! a beam from the sun, a breath from the hills, a part of the morning, the most glorious expression of nature in all nature's glory! Observe how he walks! Note how he stands still! Most men know how to walk, and most men know how to stand still, after a fashion; but not after Jerome's fashion. In motion, Jerome is a poem set a-going; standing still, he is grace doing nothing. He can lift one hand, and in that ordinary act sow the seed of a dozen beautiful fancies; he can wield such mastery over the physical forces of expression as has wondrous potency to sway the emotions of others.

So she thought; so she stood, hidden herself from sight, but with the meadow in full view; and while so thinking, and so standing, drinking him with every breath, feeding upon him with her eyes, devouring him with soul, she, the affianced wife of another!

Oh, wicked Mell!

Jerome grows impatient; he looks at his watch, and turns inquiringly towards the hill; and Mell flies back to the house as if pursued by fiery dragons. For if he but caught sight of her, if he but crooked his finger at her, she would go down there, and then—what then?

Mell was not blind to her own weakness. The afternoon brought Rube, overwhelmingly happy, overwhelmingly devoted. She must take an airing with him in his bran new buggy; and while they scoured the country round about, Rube was making diligent inquiry as to how soon they might get married. Mell caught her breath, and, in the same breath, at a possible reprieve.

“Won’t you give me a little time to think?” she pleaded. “It has come so sudden!”

“Hasn’t it, though!” cried happy Rube. “Do you half realize the romance of the thing, Mellville? ’Tis like a page out of Knight-Errantry, the days of lances and standards, and blood-thrilling adventures, when warriors in steel swore by the Holy-rood, and won fair women’s smiles by deeds of valor—something very unlike the prosaic happenings of this practical modern life. But yesterday a wandering pilgrim, to-day I have found a shrine. ‘’Tis a dream!’ I thought, when I opened my eyes this morning, ‘a dream, too sweet to be true! Rube, old fellow,’ I said to myself, ‘you’ve got something to live for now. You must look to your ways and improve upon the old ones. There’s a dear little hand that belongs to you; there’s a pair of blue eyes to watch for your coming; there’s a sweet little woman who believes in you, God bless her! For her sake I will run the race of life like a man; for her sweet sake I will win it!’ ”

This was the time for Mell to speak. She wanted to speak, but—she did not. There were just exactly six reasons why she did not.

Here they are, all in a row:

Reason Number One.—She was not quite sure of Jerome—quite sure, perhaps, in regard to his affections, but not his intentions. Love is much, but not everything, and a lover surrounded by difficulties is not to be depended upon matrimonially.

Number Two.—She was as resolutely bent upon getting out of this mean, sordid life as ever, and what way was there but this way?

Number Three.—Rube was rich, and Rube’s wife would be rich, too. For her part, she was sick and tired of poverty. Poverty, in a world governed by wealth, is the most unpardonable sin in that world’s decalogue.

Number Four.—Rube was in “society,” and what ambitious woman ever yet saved her soul outside the magic circle of society?

Number Five.—Rube was an aristocrat, and Rube’s wife would be *ex necessitate rei*, an aristocrat also. Her Creator, she believed, had intended her for an aristocrat; otherwise why had He endowed her with intellect, beauty, and the power to sway men’s passions?

Number Six.—The fact that she did not love Rube had, in reality, nothing to do with Rube’s eligibility as a husband. He would make a very good one, an infinitely better one than none at all!

Of course, she would be paying a tremendous price for all these worldly advantages. Mell was aware of that all the while, but after deducting from the gross weight of their true value the real or approximate weight of their possible evils and disadvantages, she would undoubtedly still be getting the best of a good bargain.

What is life but an enigmatical offset of losses and gain—so much gain on the one hand, so much loss on the other? And what was this transaction between herself and Rube but a repetition, under a somewhat different formula, of those mathematical problems worked out on her slate at school? It was all very simple.

Young woman, if you were in Mell's place; if you had six good reasons for not telling the man you are about to marry that you did not care a straw about him, wouldn't you hold your peace?

Then cast no stones at Mell.

Mell *was* deeply moved by Rube's words, but not deep enough to damage her future prospects. And since a woman has very poor prospects outside of matrimony, ought we not to excuse her for attending closely to business?

At all events, although Mell's thoughts were heavy, and her soul stirred within her, and her thick breathing almost stifled in a painful sense of guilt, she did not say a word. Feeling that Rube's eyes were fixed upon her, she raised to him her own, suffused in tears; an answer which fully satisfied her companion. From which it will appear that a woman may weep for the man she takes in—weep, and yet keep on taking him in.

And what can a man do? How could Rube tell that it was the hidden pathos of his own groundless faith, and not a feeling of sympathetic affection, which brought such softness of expression into that girl's luminous orbs?

If the actual is the only true thing, and amounts to everything, as it really does in the school of Realism, there is still one difficulty to be encountered—to get hold of the actual. He who aspires to find out the actual, where a woman is concerned, must get himself another kind of eye, one whose vision is introspective and able to penetrate into that mysterious element in a clever woman's nature which enables her so successfully to clothe the Not-True in the beautiful garments of Truth.

Rube Rutland felt uncertain about a good many things—his own strength under temptation, his mother's consent to this marriage, Clara's temper, the great sea serpent, the Pope's infallibility, the man in the Iron Mask, and many a cock-and-bull story beside, but he never once doubted Mell Creecy's love, the purest myth among them all.

He came, after this, every day to the little house upon the hill, and had it out "comfarterble in the parler," as old man Creecy had advised Jerome to do. He courted with the enthusiasm of an incorrigible faddist over a new fad; and no lover of those olden days of which he had spoken, when goodly knights tilted in the jousts of arms, and won fair lady's favor with deeds of prowess, ever yet surpassed a modern mighty man with a mission. Devotion itself is paralyzed when it comes to them.

At the Bigge House, as one may suppose, there had been considerable consternation when its young master announced his intention of taking to wife old Jacob Creecy's daughter. Consternation, but hardly surprise; for Rube had ever been one of those lawless members of well-conducted households privileged to say and do outrageous things, and expected to turn out of the beaten track on the slightest provocation.

Miss Rutland was most concerned. Said she to her brother:

"Rube, why not marry a female Ojibbwa, and be done with it? *That* would be an improvement on Mell Creecy as a *mésalliance*. My God! Rube, you can't bring a girl here into this house as your wife, whose father talks like a nigger, who says 'dis,' and 'dat,' and 'udder;' or do you expect to hold your

position in society, your place among honorable men, simply by the grace of heaven?"

This was severe; but it was not all—not half, in fact, that Rube had to hear before he got rid of Clara. But it was not the first time he had brought a hornet's nest about his ears, nor swam against the stream, nor borne the brunt of Clara's tongue. Through much practice Rube had pretty well mastered the art of holding out, which does not consist so much in talking back as in saying nothing. Moreover, his cause was good, and half a man can hold out with a good cause to hold on. One hard speech Rube did make to Clara; he told her, in effect, that whatever might be the grammatical shortcomings of old Jacob Creecy himself, his daughter knew more in one single minute than Clara would ever learn in a lifetime.

Mrs. Rutland was not less unwilling, but more reasonable.

"You are my only son," she said to him, "my first-born. I expected you to add lustre to the family and make a great match."

"The family is illustrious enough," replied he; "if not, it will never be more illustrious at my expense. I will have none of your great matches, mother. I intend to marry the woman I love. I have loved her ever since she was a child. None of the rest of you need marry her, however; I will not impose that task upon you. But Mellville is to be my wife to a dead certainty, and I am my own master."

"You are, my son. I have not sought to prevent your marrying her. I have only expressed my disappointment."

"Well, I am sorry about that. But see here, mother; I will make it easy for you. Keep this as your own home as long as you live, and I will make another home for myself and the wife you do not like."

"No, no, my dear boy, ever generous, ever kind! As your wife she *must* be dear to me. What is a mother's greedy aspiration compared to her child's real happiness? Follow your bent, my boy; follow it with your mother's sanction. And now, do you still love me a little, Rube, in spite of this new love?"

"A little, dear mother!" He threw his arms about her. "No, not a little! Much, very much; more than ever before! And believe me, when you know Mell, you will feel very differently about it. You have only seen her so far, through Clara's eyes; come and see her as she is; come now, mother, with me."

And so it came about that on a certain day Rube came as usual to the farmhouse, but not as usual, alone. His mother came with him—came, looking about her with prying eyes, and a nose bent on thorough investigation, and a mind ready to ferret out every idea in Mell's brain; a mind ready to probe every weak place in Mell's character; a mind ready to catechize every integument in Mell's body.

The look of things about the premises prepossessed her at once in the girl's favor. The house was neither large, handsome, nor fresh; but it was venerable, an attribute greatly esteemed by people of rank. Much of its unpainted ugliness was concealed in trailing vines and creeping ivy, much of its dilapidation shrouded in luxuriant shrubbery, an every-day adaptation of the simplest elements of relief, technique. The little front garden, in its white-sanded walks and well-weeded beds, brilliant in many-hued blossoms, was just like a spruce country-damsel in her best bib and tucker. The little parlor, daintily furnished and tastefully arranged, where the visitor trod, not on bare boards, but a neat carpet, commingling Turkish forms and Yankee interpretations, was still more suggestive. Into this cozy apartment Mell had really crowded, in practical forms, all she had

learned of human nature as it appears in man's nature. Pretty things there were, but none too pretty for use. Perfect neatness there was, but not too perfect to interfere with a man's love for the let-me-do-as-I-please principle. Here a man who smokes might, after asking permission, puff away to his heart's content, puff away without a compunction and without a frown from its ministering spirit. Or, if my lord feels in a breaking mood, let him break, break right and left, and there's no great harm done; a few dollars would put them all back. This is a consideration by no means small or unimportant to some men, who seem inspired to break everything they touch, from a woman's heart to the most venerated of old brass icons.

This little room did everything it could to please a man, and put nothing in his way; although it made him feel, with its presiding genius in it, every kind of way, except uncomfortable.

There's a rose upon the mantle, stuck by careless hand in a vase of antique design—one rose, no more; for one such faultless rose as this fills up all the spirit's longing in a rose. A thousand roses, perfect of their kind, could do no more. Here we have *sub rosa* a profound philosophical maxim showing its colors—as brief as profound, i.e., enough is enough, whether it be enough rose or enough stewed pigeon with green peas.

On a spider-legged table in this diminutive lady's bower, there sat a dish of ferns; some moss was growing in a basket; some colored strands of wool lay across a piece of canvas; a carved paper-cutter peeped out from the leaves of an unread book, left lying on an ottoman by some person who had been seated in an easy-chair with silken cushions, soft to rest upon in weariness, in a cozy corner; and on a sofa of crimson plush reposed, in restful quiet, a guitar with blue ribbon attached. This guitar told its own tale; Mell *had* learned something useful, after all, at that famous boarding-school; for to the strumming of this guitar she could sing you, with inimitable taste and in a bird-like voice, an English madrigal, or a French *chansonnette*, or one of those plaintive love ditties which finds its way into the listener's heart through any language.

"Now, mother," said Rube, looking about him with pardonable pride, "isn't this pleasant? Have we, amid all our grandeur, any such snug den as this?"

"Well, no, Rube! It is charming! *Multum in parvo*, one may say. But whom have we here?"

It was Mell, halting for one awe-struck instant in the doorway, attired in a fresh muslin dress, with ribbons to match her eyes, and cheeks dyed a red carnation at the formidable prospect of meeting, face to face, the august mistress of the Bigge House. Rube pressed forward to meet her, and took her fluttering hand in his own, and led her forward.

"Your new daughter, mother, and this, Mellville, is our good mother. You'll get along famously with her, I believe, in spite of Clara."

Who but a blundering man, like dear honest Rube, would have so completely let the domestic cat out of the bag?

No need for Mell to be the most wide-awake creature in existence to understand on the spot, the real status of affairs, as concerned herself, at the Bigge House.

Subjugated at once by her beauty, constrained to admit her lady-like deportment, Mrs. Rutland kissed the rounded cheek and hoped she would make her dear boy very happy. And Mell looked flatteringly conscious of the great lady's condescension, and blushingly avowed her unalterable de-

termination to try. This interesting little ceremony seemed to dissipate all the underlying displeasure at Rube's choice in his mother's mind.

She watched the girl closely during the interview which followed. Many girls are pretty and lady-like, not many are to be found as well educated as Mell Creecy, or as thoroughly equipped by both nature and education to entertain, to amuse, to fascinate. This was that part of Mell which "tuck arter her ole daddy," as old Jacob was wont to say. Even Clara Rutland's manners were not more easy and irreproachable, and Clara had never been half so ready in speech and apt in reply. It was a matter of agreeable wonder to Mrs. Rutland how a hard-working uneducated farmer could have such a daughter, and she wondered also if this phenomenal social prodigy could be found so strongly marked in any other land under the sun.

Obeying an instinct of curiosity, the visitor inquired :

"Your father and mother, Melville, are they here? Will they see us?"

"Not if I can help it!" inwardly.

Outwardly very different.

"So sorry! Mother is not well to-day. She is rarely well, and rarely sees anyone. Father is as usual busy upon the farm."

"Rube says your father is a very thorough farmer," remarked the visitor.

"Doesn't a good farmer make money out of it," queried Mell, glancing at her betrothed with a doubtful little smile, "just as a lawyer does out of law, and a doctor out of physic? The earth is full of gold, and ought not a good digger to strike it somewhere—some time? Father, at any rate, is devoted to farming, as an occupation, and is happy in it, getting out of the ground more of God's secrets than the rest of us find among the stars."

"That is a pretty idea, Melville," said Mrs. Rutland.

"Bless you!" exclaimed Rube, "that's nothing! She's full of 'em!"

Full of them, yes; and feeding his honest soul upon them, in place of the real bread of affection.

The visit was long and pleasant, and at its close Mell accompanied her guests to the very door of their carriage. There Mrs. Rutland again touched the girl's soft cheek with her high-bred lips. Her foot was upon the stepping-stone, when with a sudden thought, she turned once more.

"Melville, we are to be very gay next week, a house full of company; but I suspect we shall be honored with very little of Rube's society unless we first secure yours. Will you come, then, and make us a little visit?"

"You are kind," answered she, coloring beautifully with intensity of gratification. "Most kind! I will come with exceeding pleasure."

These were perhaps the first unstudied words she had uttered in Mrs. Rutland's presence. There was no doubt about her wanting to go to the Bigge House. She had been wanting to go there a long time. A veritable flood-tide of joy filled her being at this speedy consummation of her dearest hopes, but it was not of this she thought at that moment, nor of Mrs. Rutland, nor of Rube. "I will see Jerome," was what Mell thought.

"Sweetest of mothers!" said Rube inside the vehicle.

"Luckiest of men!" returned his mother. "I am returning home as did the Queen of Sheba; the half was not told!"

Rube now felt solid, unquestionably solid, in his own mind.

Mell, standing yet in the gateway, looked after them; gladly received they had been, like many another guest; gladly, too, dismissed.

"The chain tightens," cogitated the future mistress of the Bigge House, "and if I should want to break it!"

But why should she want to break it, unless —"

"There's no use counting upon that," Mell frankly admitted to herself, "and no man's difficulties must be allowed to interfere with my future. And Rube is *so* eligible! A good fellow, too; a most excellent fellow! There's a something, however. What is it?"

We will tell you, Mell—Rube is not Jerome.

Going back into the house she found her father and mother peeping through the blinds.

"Lord, Lord!" exclaimed old Jacob. "You'se jess er gittin' up, Mell! I knowed ye could do it, darter; but I mus' say, I never lookt fer yer ter git es high es the Bigge House."

Mrs. Creecy inquired about Mrs. Rutland. Was she nice? pleasant?

"Very. No one could be nicer or pleasanter. She asked for you—both of you."

"She did? Then why didn't you tell us?"

"Wife!" remonstrated the old farmer, "you is sartingly loss yo' senses! Don't ye know, when Mell's fine friends comes er long, we's expected ter run inter er rat-hole or some udder hole? All the use chillun has fer parients these days is ter keep 'em er going. Onst Mrs. Rullan', Mell aint gwine ter know us by site! She aint no chile er mine, no how, Mell aint!"

"Wall, now, she is yourn, I kin tell ye," cried Mrs. Creecy, flaring up, very much to the enjoyment of her liege lord.

The daughter turned off in disgust. Her father's pleasantries were the least pleasant of all his disagreeable ways. A coarse man's humor is apt to be the coarsest thing about him.

It was under very different auspices from those of her day dreams, that Mell, after a few days of busy preparation, was admitted into the sacred precincts of the social hierarchy.

Jerome was to have been the founder of her greatness, her steersman in these unknown waters—not Rube.

None in this higher realm welcomed her more graciously than Clara. Clara had high views of philosophy, but only one maxim: "See how the hare runs, hear how the owl cries, accept the inevitable, and get all you can out of it."

Jerome returned from Cragmore the day following her own domestication into this new sphere of existence. How strange it all seemed, and how unnatural! How strange he should find her there, and with so good a right to be there! Surely years have intervened since those lovely mornings in the meadow, when Sukey cropped the dew-wet grass, and she sat on the old tree-stump and Jerome lay at her feet.

Surely long, long years!

So long that Jerome has forgotten all about them—and her. She is now to him only Miss Creecy, the prospective wife of his nearest friend, the prospective mistress of the Bigge House, and not attractive, it would appear, in these new surroundings. Others, very likely, did not notice how he never spoke to her, if he could help it; how he never looked at her, if he could help it; how they kept far apart, as far as the East is from the West, though sleeping under the same roof, and eating at the same table, and constantly together morning, noon, and night. Others did not notice all these things, but Mell did.

"He despises me," sobbed Mell in the darkness of her own chamber,

smothering her sobs in her own pillow. "Once he loved, and now he despises me!"

Better go to sleep, Mell; tears cannot wash away stern facts, and what good would it do now, if he did love you?

The other guest has come; the one of whom Jerome had spoken. It is the Honorable Archibald Pendergast, who is middle-aged, well-fed, and somewhat portly, who has big round shoulders and a jolly way of looking at things, who bellows out his words with a broad accent, and says, Aw! aw! with tremendous effect; who wears his whiskers *à la manière Anglaise*, as befits a man proud of his British ancestry and his English ways. This great man's marvellous wealth and honors, and incalculable influence in national councils, and stupendous grandeur of future prospects, carry everything before him—at the Bigge House, and everywhere else.

Adapting herself with versatile cleverness, to these prevailing conditions in her unaccustomed environment, Mell's conception of modes and manners expanded day by day, and she began to see plainly a good many objects only dimly discerned before.

"I don't think," remarked she, quite innocently to Rube, the day after the great man's advent, "that Mr. Devonhough admires the Senator as much as the rest of us."

"I shouldn't wonder!"

Rube looked knowing and laughed.

"If he was as badly stuck on you as he appears to be on Clara, I wouldn't admire him either!"

"But," said Mell, "is Jerome?"

"Yes, certainly. Didn't you know that? I thought you did. They are in the same interesting predicament as ourselves. Only Clara wont announce, because she wants to keep up to the last minute her good times with other men. I don't see how Devonhough stands it, and I'm awfully glad you're not that sort of a girl!"

"How long?" asked not-that-sort-of-a-girl, trying to steady her voice, trying to maintain her rôle of a disinterested inquirer.

"How long have they been engaged!" repeated Rube. "Let me see—Six months at least."

"Six months!"

"You seem surprised, Mell." He turned his glance full upon her.

"Not at all," said she, pulling herself to rights. "I was only thinking that you ought to be willing to wait as long as that."

"So I would; as many years, for that matter, if there was any good reason why I should. But there is not; not one, and so, Mell—"

"Six months!" ejaculated Mell, in the privacy of her own room. "So all the while he lay at my feet he was engaged to Clara Rutland!"

Mell began to understand Jerome's difficulties.

Later on she saw clearly some other things. Clara is fond of Jerome, and would gladly, for that reason, marry him; but she is likewise attracted by the mighty Senator's wealth, and national importance, and English ancestry, and future expectations; and for such reasons leans matrimonially towards the Honorable Archibald, who is thirty years older than Jerome, but thirty years richer and thirty years greater. Between two fires Clara meanwhile keeps to the letter of the law with Jerome, and holds out in ambuscade *le pot au lait* to the Honorable Archibald.

A closer acquaintance with the interior circuit of these unwonted surroundings, so delicately refined, so distinctly aristocratic, so far above her

own poor world, and yet withal, so unsatisfying and so "over-charged with surfeiting," developed to Mell the startling fact that a life spent in incessant amusement not only soon ceases to amuse, but becomes, in process of time, a devouring conflict with *ennui*. She recalled with a sense of wondering comprehension the Arab proverb: "All sunshine makes the desert."

Another thing, these women at ease, with nothing in the world to do, Mell was thunderstruck to discover, were the hardest worked people she had ever known, striving each on a daily battle-ground of dawdling, dressing, and pleasure. Seeking after some personal end, some empty honor, or some favorite phantom just out of reach. What bickering and strife; what small conspiracies; what canker at the roots and stunting in the fruit; what Guelph and Ghibbeline factions in the midst of all this music, and dancing, and laughter! The same amount of time spent in a good cause, Mell's long head could not but realize, would ease the rack, plant many a blade of corn, staunch many a bleeding wound, wipe the death drops from many a ghastly brow, lift up heaps of fallen heroes prone on stony plains, and plant the standard of the cross on many a benighted shore. Outside, Mell had yearned towards this stronghold of the rich, as a place where there was plenty of room for growth and happiness: inside, she discovered with astonishment and a groan, that there was plenty of room there for dullness and unhappiness as well. Idleness without repose, leisure and no ease, tears and no time to shed them—on every side, and unexpected dry-rot in the substance of things, she had pictured to her own fancy as fair, and only fair.

"Then," interrogated Mell of her conscious Ego, "if not here, where dwelleth content?"

Mayhap, Mell, upon the rock where the hawk's nest, or in that haven where the roving wind hideth its tired self for rest. Somewhere, but never among the haunts of men. The deep hath its treasures, and there are treasures of the mine; the mind hath its treasures, and there are treasures of store; but content is the golden treasure, hardest of all to find, and when found hardest to keep.

One night there was a ball, and the social lights of Pudney and Cragmore, and the capital of the State itself, turned out in full force. The Bigge House was crammed to its utmost capacity.

Dressing early, Mell left her room to other guests, in various stages of evening toilet, and descending to the first floor, looked about her for some quiet spot where, for a time, she could hide herself and her tumultuous thoughts. The large reception room was dimly lighted as yet, and empty apparently. Glad to find it so, she walked in, and standing between the long pier-glasses, a tapering column draped in tulle clouds, took a full-length, back and front inspection of her own person.

Now this dainty rustic maiden, as we have seen, looked at when framed in a high-necked, long-sleeved, simple morning-gown, made a sweet picture for any eye; but it was, in some respects, a tame presentation compared to this gorgeously arrayed being, bedecked in flowers and a low corsage, with marble shoulders, shapely throat, alabaster neck and rounded arms, bewilderingly displayed, cunningly concealed. This fairy-like being cannot be a *bona fide* woman; she is more likely a study from Reynolds or Gainsborough, who has stepped out of canvas and a gilt frame on the wall there, merely to delight the living eye and inflame the fumes of vital fancy.

Not long, however, whether sprite or woman, did she pose there in ad-

miration of her own face and figure. For, truth to tell, they have both become hateful in the girl's own sight. Her fair face looks to herself no longer as a fresh-gathered blossom sparkling with dew, as the ethereal interpreter of a woman's pure soul, blameless and serene. Much more does it look, to her own acute sensibilities, as a painted mask, put on for hard service; always in place, always properly adjusted, proof against attack, but every little loophole needing to be defended at every point. A mask very troublesome to wear, but not upon any account to be discarded, since it concealed the discordance of a secret love and the clanking of a chain.

But now, to-night, in this empty room, in this deep silence and blessed solitude, where there is no eye to see, no ear to hear, she will throw off for one thankful moment the ugly, hateful thing. She will allow the dejected visage to fitly portray the dejected mind; she will breathe freely once more, and sigh and sigh, and moan and moan, and wring her hands in uncontrollable agony; and, ignoring the fact that the heaviest part of her trouble is of her own making, wonder why she had ever been born for such as this.

Hope is entirely dead in Mell's heart. Transplanted out of the lowly valley of her own birth to the mountain-tops of her soul's desire, she feels as lonely as we might imagine the spirit of Greek art, set down in a modern world. Turn whatever way she would, there was but one fate for her—martyrdom. If she did not marry Rube, she would be a martyr in her own humble home; if she did marry him, she would be a martyr in his more pretentious one; and there was not as great a difference as she had thought between the air in the valley and the air on the mountain-top. It is the lungs which breathe, and not the air inhaled, most at issue, and a martyr is a martyr anywhere, the social type being hardly less excruciating to undergo than others more quickly ended.

Pitiful in the extreme are such thoughts in a young mind; pitiful such manifestations of suffering in one too young to suffer.

How the people upstairs would be surprised if they could see her! How the Honorable Archibald, who liked things jolly, begawd! who thought all evidence of feeling bad form, you know; who believed, root and branch, in British stoicism, even in the jaws of death; how he would advise her in a spirit of friendliness and a well-bred way, not aw to make a blawsted dolt of herself—if he only knew. Fortunately, he did not know; fortunately, nobody knew.

Nobody?

Then who or what is that creature in semblance of man, in attitude of deepest thought, with folded arms and hanging head, darkly shadowed, dimly seen, scarcely discernible in the embrasure of the window over there?

Spirit or man? If a man, he might be a dead one for all the noise he makes—only a dead man was never known before to use his eyes in such a lively manner, or his ears to such good purpose, or to betray so deep an interest in a living woman, even in a ball dress.

Mell did not look towards him, did not know he was there; yet, on a sudden, as if from some inward sense of vigilance rather than any extraneous source of knowledge, her pulses strangely fluttered—she became aware that she was not in reality alone. *How*, in the absence of visual impression, we can only say by an instinct as unaccountable as the phenomenon of sound waves which excite wire vibrations.

She was mysteriously imbued with another presence, if such a thing is possible, and in all the world there was but one who could so clothe the circumambient air in his own personality.

That one was Jerome Devonhough. Perceiving she now knew he was there, he got up and came towards her.

Mell did not look at him ; she looked upon the floor. He looked straight at her, and looked so long and hard, and with a gaze so fixed and steady, that he seemed to be slowly absorbing her very being into his own entity.

When this became intolerable, the fairy-like apparition in tulle, wrestling with the situation, on a war footing with her own feelings, lifted from a glowing face those *lapis lazuli* eyes of hers—pure stones liquified by soul action—to his face and dropped them. In one swift turn of those eyes she had taken in as much of that stern, cold, accusing face as she could well bear. But there was nothing on it she had not expected to see. She knew the unrelenting disdain of that proud nature for what is stained, unworthy, unwomanly, as well as she knew its strength to esteem, its gift to exalt, its power to bless.

And to look into a once loving face now grown cold, and to find there no longer an indulgent smile nor approving aspect, is not an experience to be coveted, even by the happiest.

“You are enjoying it, I hope,” said at length a low mocking voice.

“Enjoying it!” retorted plucky Mell, “of course I am enjoying it! Why shouldn’t I? I am probably enjoying it as much as you are!”

“More, I hope. I, for one, never did enjoy being miserable.”

“Oh, miserable!” exclaimed Mell, in a lively tone. His misery appeared to put her in the highest spirits. “Going to marry a rich girl and feeling miserable over it, how is that? You ought to be as happy, almost, as I am!”

“The happiness which needs to be so extolled,” replied Jerome, with a sardonic laugh, “rests on a slim foundation. Mine is of a different stamp. It leads me to envy the very worms as they crawl under my feet. Even a worm is free to go where his wishes lead him—even a worm is free to find an easy death and quick, when life becomes insupportable.”

Mell pressed her hand upon her heart, beating so fast—that pent-up heart in a troubled breast, which rose and fell as a storm-tossed vessel amid tempestuous seas.

“You cannot blame me for it,” said she wildly. “You slighted me, you trifled with me, you goaded me to it! I would do it again; if need be!”

“Once has been enough,” Jerome told her, in sadness. Speech was an effort to him ; when a man regards some treasure, once his own now lost to him, he thinks much, but he has little to say. That little, nine times out of ten, would better be left unsaid. Jerome felt it so; for a long time he said nothing more—he only continued to look at the woman he had lost.

She continued to contemplate the floor, until those polished boards, waxed in readiness for gay dancers’ feet, became to her a sorry sight indeed, and a source of nervous irritation. When their glances encountered again, hers was full of passionate entreaty, his of inflamed regret.

“I have a question to put to you,” he broke forth, harshly. “What right have you to marry Rube Rutland, loving me?”

“The same right that you have to marry Clara Rutland, loving me!”

This turned the tables. Now Jerome’s glance was riveted upon those polished boards, and she looked at him. She had not had so good a look at him in a long time, and her two eyes had never been eyes enough to take in as much of him as her heart craved.

“At least,” said Jerome, regaining his composure and holding up his head, “this much may be said for me. My contract with her was made in good faith. I liked her well enough— I loved no one else—it was all

right until I met you. My soul is as a pure white dove in this matter, compared to yours! And these bonds of mine, they hang but by a single thread. Our future would have been assured but for your broken faith."

"Mine? It is all *your* fault, not mine! Had you trusted me, as a man ought to trust the woman he loves, all might have been well with us."

"All would have been well with us had you trusted *me*, as a woman should trust the man she loves. Did I not ask you so to trust me? Great God! Mellville, could I conceive that you would stake your future happiness—our future happiness, on the paltry issues of a foot-race? That whole day my mind was full of projects for bringing about a happy termination to all our troubles. I could have done it! I would have done it! But now!"

Lashed into fury by a vivid conception of his own wrongs, brought about, as he chose to consider, through her treachery alone, Jerome turned upon her angrily:

"Let me tell you one thing! You shall not marry Rube Rutland!"

"Shall I not?"

Mell laughed—not one of her musical laughs. Now that she was fairly in for it, she rather enjoyed this fencing match with Jerome. Hitherto, she had always by stress of circumstances, acted upon the defensive with him; now she could assert her mastery.

"Shall I not? How will you prevent it?"

"I will open his eyes. I will tell him you do not care a rap for him."

"You will tell him that? Very well. I will *swear* to him that I do. Whom will he believe? *Not you!*"

Her words, her manner, were exasperating, and they were intended to be exasperating. That cool and systematic self-control which characterized Jerome, had more than aroused a feeling of rebellious protest in the girl's impetuous nature. If she could break him up a little—

"*I say you shall not marry him!*" The words were not loudly spoken, but they were the utterances of a man much in earnest. "Rather than see you his wife I would gladly see you dead!"

"Oh, no doubt! But let me tell you, sir, I do not propose to die to please you! I propose to please myself by becoming the wife of Rube Rutland!"

This was too much, even for Jerome.

"You heartless, cruel, wicked woman!"

With a single stride he reached her side; he shook his finger rudely in her face; nay, in a frenzy of mad passion he did worse than that—he took hold of the wayward creature herself and shook her with such violence that those heavy coils of hair, upon which she had expended so much time and pains, loosened and fell about her in a reckless loveliness beyond the reach of art.

"Woman, do you know what you are doing? Do you know that you are playing with dangerous implements? toying with men's passions? dallying with men's souls?"

It is safe to say, Mell had never had such a shaking up, however frequent the occasions when she had deserved it.

This unconventional usage on the part of Jerome, a man who wore self-possession and correct manners as an every day coat of mail, not only surprised Mell, but terrified and subdued her. In undertaking to "break up" Jerome by stirring up the green-eyed monster, Mell had neglected to take into account the well-established fact, that no jealous man stands long upon ceremony. Panting for breath, she awoke unpleasantly to a full com-

prehension of a madman's possibilities, and ignoring all those impassioned inquiries with which he had interlarded the severer measures of corporeal punishment, she remarked in a spirit of meekness and a very faint voice :

"Jerome, let me go, please ; you are hurting me."

"But how much more you are hurting me," said Jerome, harshly.

He released her, however, and felt ashamed. No man with, real manliness in him, but does feel ashamed after he has hurt a woman. She may have deserved it, and yet he feels ashamed.

One would think that now after this ungentlemanly conduct on Jerome's part, Mell the high spirited will not only be full of a tremendous indignation, but be willing, and more than willing, to give him up for good and all.

How little you know a woman, you who think that ! A harmless man never does anywhere so little harm as in a woman's affections. The rod of empire sways the world and a woman's mind—all women, to a great or less degree ; all women are sisters.

In other words, it is very necessary for a man to be capable of shaking up a woman for past offences, and present naughtiness, when she needs it, or else he must make up his mind to take a back seat and give up the supremacy. Some of the fair sex never come to terms without a shaking—there may be one or two, here and there among them, who never come to terms, even with a shaking !

Mell did not belong to this small minority ; she was completely subdued. Contrite, and submissive, she now approached her audacious antagonist ; approached him timidly, where he stood a little apart, and with his back turned to her, feeling, as we have said, quite ashamed of himself, and said gently :

"Jerome, I will break with Rube if you will break with Clara."

"An honorable man cannot leave a woman in the lurch," answered he, in a manner indicative of a strong protest under the existing law.

"And how about an honorable woman ?" interrogated Mell.

"She can lie, and lie, and still be honorable," he informed her with fiery irony.

"Then you expect me to——"

"I do ! I confidently expect you to do it, and at once. Break with him, and have a little patience with me, until Clara gets the Honorable Archibald taut on the line, and awakens to the fact that she loves me still—but only as a brother ! It is coming—it is sure to come, and before long."

"In the meantime," remarked Mell, with a peculiar expression, "what's the use of hurting Rube's feelings ?"

"Gods and angels, listen !" exclaimed her companion, in overwhelming indignation. "The question then has narrowed down to the getting of a husband without regard to any body's feelings—save Rube. His are not to be hurt until you can hurt them with impunity ! You are bound to hold on to *him* until you secure *me*, beyond a peradventure ! That is your little game, Mell, is it ? Out upon you ! Oh, unfortunate man that I am, to have fallen into the hands of a woman who is particular as to the fit of her ball dress, but has no preference when it comes to a husband ; who has the aspect of a goddess, but the easy principles of a Delilah ; who is, in fact, not a genuine woman at all, with a heart and a soul in her, but a man-eating monster, seeking prey—a shark in woman's clothing, ready to take into the matrimonial clutch, and swallow at a single gulp, *me*, if you can get me ; if not me, Rube ; if not Rube, any other eligible creature in man's guise, whether descended from a molecule in the coral,

or a tadpole in the spawn: whether a swine of Epicurus, or an ape just from Barbary! Shame upon you, woman! Shame! Shame!

Restive under these severe strictures, Mell had made several ineffectual attempts to put a stop to them, but her appealing gestures implored in vain. Finding he would not desist, she bit her lips in great agitation, and crimsoned violently.

"You are the most impertinent man in existence!" she informed him petulantly, when he had done.

"That's right, Mell," he answered. "Turn red—turn red to the tips of your eyelashes! It is the most hopeful sign I have yet seen. Melville, look at me."

She raised to him wonderingly her wondrously beautiful eyes.

"I have been asking myself how I could love you so well, a woman who could condescend to sail under false colors; who knows how to stoop from her high estate, and trick, and juggle, and blind; who has set a trap to catch a mouse, and victimizes her prey; who has spread her toils to obtain a husband under false pretences. I have asked myself many times, 'how can you love that woman?' I have wished that I loved you less—that I loved you not at all! And I would crush it out—this unspeakable tenderness, which shields and defends your image in my heart—crush it out, beat it down, tear it into tatters, grind it into dust under the heel of an inexorable resolve, but that I believe, but that I *know*, Mell, that there is something within you deeper, better, worthier! 'Truth is God,' and the woman who is true in all things is a part of Divinity. But what of the woman who is false where she ought to be true? Let her hide her head in the presence of devils! Be true, then, Mell, be earnest! This frivolous trifling with life's most serious concerns shows so small in a being born to a noble heritage! It is only excusable in a natural *niais*, or a woman unendowed with a soul."

Jerome here paused. After a moment spent in thought, he approached his companion very near, and in a voice of passionate tenderness resumed:

"My darling! you can never know what hours of torment, what days of suffering, this conduct of yours has cost me. But I believe you have erred more through thoughtlessness, and a pardonable feeling of resentment—more through love turned into madness, than any settled determination to do wrong. But now let it go no further. Hasten to set yourself right with Rube. No matter whether you and I are destined to be happy in each other's love or not; at all hazards be true to the immortal within you. Promise me to undo the mischief you have done; promise me to be a good, true, useful woman, thinking more of duty than your own interest and pleasure. The world is overstocked with butterflies, but it needs good women, and I want you to be one of them—the best! My darling, you will promise me?"

Mell was much affected; she hung her head and her bosom heaved.

"Do you hesitate?" cried Jerome, mistaking her silence. "Promise me, Mell, I implore, I beseech you!"

"Theatricals?" asked a voice in the doorway.

It was Rube.

"Rehearsing your parts?" he again inquired, coming in.

"Yes," replied Jerome. "For are we not all players upon a stage?"

"And what play have they decided upon?" next questioned the unsuspecting Rube, who, carrying no concealed weapons himself, was never on the lookout for concealed weapons on others.

"I don't recall the name," said Jerome. "Do you, Miss Creecy? It is 'Lover's Quarrel,' or some such twaddle, I think."

Mell thought it was something of that kind, but she furthermore expressed the opinion that it would be well-nigh impossible to get it up in time for the delectation of the Honorable Archibald.

"Which is no great pity," declared the off-hand Rube; "I wish he'd take himself elsewhere to be delectated."

There was no doubt as to Rube's preferences for a brother-in-law; which, however, did not take away from the awkwardness of this remark. Not suspicious, neither was Rube obtuse; he noted a singular contraction on Jerome's brow, he noted a strange confusion in Mell's manner, and he put it all down to his own blundering tongue, which was always placing his best friend either in a false or in an annoying position before Mell. Out of these considerations he made haste to subjoin:

"Ah, Mellville, you should have seen Devonhough how splendidly he acquitted himself in our class plays at college!"

This was a pure offering from friendship's store. Honest Rube, with his fine open countenance all aglow with enthusiasm for his friend and joy in the presence of the woman he loved, looked the archetype of hopeful young manhood, untouched, as yet, by sorrow or mistrust. Regarded from an architectural standpoint, he had the sublime simplicity and dignity of the Doric, which was just wherein he differed from Jerome, who was a Corinthian column, delicately chiselled, ornately moulded.

Mell remarked, in reply to this expression of lively admiration from Rube, that she wished she could have seen Mr. Devonhough—or something. Mr. Devonhough, with the expression of a man whose self-respect will not admit of his bearing much more, said with an impatient "Pshaw," that she needn't wish to have seen him, that this good acting of his was all in Rube's eye, and nowhere else; that he hated an actor, and that he never would act another part himself, as long as he lived, not to oblige anybody, and so help him God!

After which, shadowed by clouds, beleaguered with dark thoughts, with sombre fires of jealousy smoldering in his eye, and war-hounds of anxiety gnawing at his vitals, he abruptly turned and left the room—not with his usual deliberation.

And still Rube saw nothing.

"He's real cut up," said the sympathetic Rube, looking commiseratingly after the friend of his bosom. "And all for what? Because a woman never seems certain of her own mind. When judgment overtakes you women what is to become of you all, anyhow—eh, Mell?"

Mell could hardly say; and Rube, dismissing Jerome from his mind for the present, found other occupation. He had never seen Mell before in full dress. He addressed himself *con amore*, and exclusively, for a time, to the study of structural femininity and those marvels of nature presented to the eye of the earnest investigator, in the shape of a well-formed woman on the outside of a ball dress.

During this process Rube's sensations were indefinable.

Mell, preoccupied in thoughts of her own, hears, at length, his voice dreamily, as a sound from afar, and looks up irritably to see, for the hundredth time, how coarse of fibre Rube is compared to Jerome.

She resents the unpalatable fact. She resents something else, and makes a very vigorous but unavailing effort to gain her freedom.

"I cannot understand," playfully remonstrated Rube, and with arms immovable, "why so simple a matter disturbs you so much. You are as

white as a sheet, you are quivering like a leaf, your hands are icy cold, and what is it all about?"

"I told you never, *never* to do that!" cried out Mell, in an agony of passionate protest.

Even the most cold-blooded among mortals finds the caress of a person not dear to them offensive; but take the woman of emotional nature, exquisitely sensitive in all matters of feeling, and to such the touch of unloved lips is worse than a plague spot.

"Don't you hear me? I cannot bear it! I am not used to it!"

There was something more than maidenly coyness in her tone; there was mental anguish, and a downright shade of anger. We wonder Rube did not detect it. But you know, gentle reader, how it is. There are so many things all around and about us which we do not hear and see, because we are intent upon other matters, and are not looking for them. With such feelings, in that dreadful moment Mell would rather have submitted to a dozen stripes from Jerome, than one single caress from Rube—her future husband, bear you in mind! the being by whose side she expected to pass the rest of her days. Poor Mell! If getting up in the world requires self-torture, self-immolation such as this, wouldn't it be better, think you, not to get up? Wouldn't it be better, in the long run, for every woman, situated as you are, to use a dagger, and thereby not only settle her future, but get clean out of a world where such sufferings are necessary? There can't be any other world much worse, judged by your present sensations.

But Rube, as we have said, did not hear that piteous wail of a woman coercing her flesh and blood, the frame of her mind, the bent of her soul. She was his own, and no words could tell, how he loved her. If a man cannot lawfully kiss his own wife, or one so near to being his own wife, it is a hard case, truly. That one little slip "'twixt the cup and the lip," which has played such havoc in men's expectations, from the first beginnings of time to the present moment, did not enter into Rube's calculations, or his thoughts.

He was in a playful and a loving mood. He tightened his clasp upon her, he chucked her under the chin, he pinched her cheek, he patted those sunny locks of hers and smiled down into that fair face, *faire les yeux doux*, and babbled to her in lover-language, not unlike the "pitty, pitty ittle shing" upon which we linguistically feed helpless infancy, as little witting the possible sufferings of the child under such an infliction, as Rube did Mell's.

"Now truly, Mell," asked Rube, "did you never let any other fellow kiss you—never? not once?"

"No!" said Mell, emphatic and indignant. "*Never!* And *you* shouldn't now, if I could help myself! Do go away! I tell you I'm not used to such as this!"

She was almost ready to cry.

The whole thing was immensely amusing and entertaining to Rube, and while he laughed, he could also understand how it might come hard on a girl, at first, to feel the bloom despoiled on her chaste lips.

"But you will get used to it after awhile," he assured her, with a quiet smile. "My word for it, you will! I will see to it that you do. There now, my pretty one (just what Jerome called her) sweet, frightened bird, why ruffle your beautiful plumage against these bars? They are made of adamant; but only be quiet and take to them kindly and they will not derange a single feather. You are exquisitely lovely to-night! You will in-

toxicate all beholders ! And have you been thinking of that blissful time when we are going to get married ?”

She had, of course; but what made him so impatient ? Couldn't he wait until she got back home ? Rube could, certainly ; but only on conditions, and those conditions would come very hard on a girl not used to a lover's kiss, and who objected to a lover's fondling, unless she managed well.

Fortunately, Mell could manage well. She could have managed the diversified attractions of a dime museum if necessary.

“ And before he shall desecrate my lips again,” Mell vowed to herself, under her breath, “ I will perish by my own hands !”

Ah ! Mell, Mell, you should have thought of that before you sold yourself !

At daylight she crawled upstairs and into bed. The ball had been a great success and she its reigning belle. Women like her, with such a form, with such a face, with such glory of hair and wealth of high spirits and physical exuberance, work like a spell in a ball-room. There was something bewildering in the gleam of her eye ; something intoxicating in the turn of her neck, the flow of her garments.

She had danced, to please Rube, more than once with Jerome. It was while the two were floating together in that delirious rapture of conscious nearness, to which the conventional waltz gives pretext and the stamp of propriety, and while their senses swayed to the rhythmic measure of the sweetest music they had ever heard, that Mell looked up meltingly into her partner's face—a face absorbed, excited, yet darkly set with a certain sternness which Mell fully understood—looked up and said to him : “ Only wait until I get back home.” Simple words indeed, and holding little meaning for those who heard; but they gave a new lease of life to Jerome. He answered back in a whisper, certain words. And now it only remained for Clara Rutland to accept the Honorable Archibald Pendergast and the happiness of two loving hearts would be assured.

The ball is over, gone, past, never to come back again, with its waltz melody, its ravishing rhyme without reason, its sweet smelling flowers, its foam-crested wine, its outlying joy, its underlying pathos, its hidden sweetness, and its secret pain. For, there never was a ball yet which had its lights and not its shadows ; which did not have some heavy foot among its light fantastic toes ; some heavy heart among its gallant men and beautiful women.

Mell lives it over in the pale dawn. It made her blood curdle and her flesh creep to think of those two men. What was she going to do with them—Rube and Jerome ? How was it all to end ?

Horrible it would be to break off with Rube, more horrible still not to do so. Fearful it would be to tell him the truth—the whole truth. But that was what Jerome expected her to do, what she ought to do.

Those words of his were burned into her memory with fire. He wanted her to become a good, true, useful woman; and be no longer a butterfly.

He had called her ‘ my darling. ’ He had called her so twice. He loved her just as much as ever. In fact, he loved her more ; for the man is not living who does not love a woman more when he finds out somebody else loves her as well as he.

She was quite decided, and Jerome was undeniably right ; there was but one honorable course for her to follow. Even if Jerome married Clara, and she herself never had another offer of marriage (she never would have another such as Rube) how sweet it would be, even in a life of loneliness, to be free, to be able to maintain the dignity and the probity of her woman-

hood, to be able to throw aside the despicable part of a double-dealer and a deceiver, to be able to feel that she had been worthy of Jerome though never his.

Thus Mell felt when she stretched her weary limbs on that silken couch of ease in the dim morning light, and turned her face to the wall, and closed her eyes, and thought of that exquisite moment, when from Jerome's shoulder, conventionally used, she had proffered to him the olive branch of peace and had caught the heavenly beams of that smile which restored her to his favor. With the bewitchment of this smile reflected upon the fair lineaments of her own face, Mell fell into that sweet rest, which remains even for the people who flirt.

But how different everything always seems the day after the ball!

It must be the gaslight in the ball-room, it must be the sunlight in the day-time, which makes all the difference. Sunlight is the effulgence of a God, and lights up Reality; gas-light is a ray kindled by the feeble hand of man to brighten the unreal—a delusion and a snare.

The absurd fancies of a ball-room hide their fantastic fumes in the broad daylight.

Coming down to a six o'clock dinner—finding Rube at the bottom of the stairs to attend upon her—finding the assembled company, including the Honorable Archibald, half-famished and yet kept waiting for their dinner, until the future mistress of the Bigge House put in an appearance, Mell began more clearly to estimate her own importance—her own, but through Rube. Her beauty, her wit, they were her own; but they had availed her little before her betrothment to Rube. Especially was she impressed with this aspect of the case, when, hanging upon his arm, she entered the brilliant drawing room to become immediately the bright particular star of the social heavens, the cynosure of all eyes; to be immediately surrounded by flattering sycophants; to be pelted with well-bred raillery for her tardiness and sleepy-headedness; to be bowed down to and revered and waited upon and courted and admired by these high-born people—she, old Jacob Creecy's daughter, but the future wife of the young master of this lordly domain.

And Jerome expected her to give all this up—did he? And to give it up whether he gave up Clara, or not? Jerome was simply crazy—and she would be a good deal crazier herself before he caught her doing it! Mell still has an eye to the main chance. Mell still “tuck arter her ole daddy!”

The summer wanes. The ripened grain is harvested and the chaff falling from the sheaves on the threshing floor; the patient teams sniff the first cool breeze and put their shoulders to the wheel; the wagons are heaped in corn; the fields grow white for the picking. In the windings of green valleys yellow leaves and red play fast and loose amid the green, and go fluttering to the ground; the deer stalks abroad; glad hunters blow their horns, and the unleashed hounds are joyful at the scent of noble prey.

Twice has the moon changed, and Mell is still at the Bigge House, showing up amid its polished refinements, as a choice bit of Corian faïence contrasted with cut-glass. Every day she spoke of going, but every day there was some reason why she should not go and should stay. Mrs. Rutland wanted her to stay; and Mell herself, whatever her misgivings, whatever her struggles, whatever her trials, wanted, too, on the whole, to stay. Here was a congenial atmosphere of style and fashion, congenial occupation—or the congenial want of any, endless variety of amusement, the hourly excitement of spirited contact with kindred minds, and no vulgar father and

mother to mortify her tender sensibilities. Here, too, she was in the presence of the one being on earth she most loved, and even to see him under cold restraint, was better than not to see him at all. Sometimes it happened they sat near each other for a few blissful seconds; sometimes it was a stolen look into each other's eyes; sometimes an accidental touch of the hand when Jerome was initiating the ladies into the ingenious methods of a fore-overhand stroke or a back-underhand stroke, or the effective results of skillful volleying—such casual trifles as these, unnoticed by others, but more precious to them than "the golden wedge of Ophir."

So the days passed on; rainy days, dry days, clear days, cloudy days, bright days, dark days, every kind of day, and every one of them a day's march nearer the imperishable day.

"There's a messenger outside, Miss Mellville, to say that your father is sick and wishes you to come home."

Jerome, it was, who spoke.

"Father sick!" exclaimed Mell. "I will go at once."

"How provoking!" broke in Mrs. Rutland. "I wanted you particularly to-day. Rube, too. Don't you remember he wants you to go to Pudney?"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mell hastily. She did not wish Mrs. Rutland to say before Jerome what Rube wanted her to go there for. It was to have her picture taken. "I am very sorry, but if father is really sick I ought to go."

"Rhesus is under saddle," said Jerome. "Shall I ride over and find out just how he is? I can do so in a very few minutes."

"No!" said Mell, with quick speech and restrained emphasis. Whom would he see there? What would he hear? Her mother in an old cotton frock, talking bad grammar. And Jerome was so delicate in his tastes, so fastidious and æsthetic.

"No," said Mell, decidedly. "I'm much obliged, but—"

"Yes," interposed Mrs. Rutland, "I wish you would go, for Rube is not here and I've no notion of letting Mell go unless it is necessary."

"Did you say I must not?" inquired Jerome, addressing Mell and not moving.

"Go, if Mrs. Rutland wishes it," stammered Mell, furiously angry with herself that she could not utter such commonplace words to him without getting all in a tremor. They were all blind, these people, or they must have seen, long ago, how it stood with Jerome and herself.

He was back in an incredibly short space of time.

"I saw your mother," Jerome reported. (Great heavens! in her poke-berry homespun, without a doubt!) Your father is quite sick, but not dangerously so. He only fancied seeing you, but can wait until to-morrow."

While the old man waited, Mell had her pretty face photographed for Rube.

He drove her home in the buggy the next morning. Coming in sight of the quiet and shade of the old farm house and recalling, as a forgotten dream, its honest industry, its homely manners, its sweet simplicity, Mell marvelled at her own sensations. Could it be gladness, this feeling that swept over her at sight of the old home? Yes, it was gladness. Perplexed in mind, heavy at heart, and fretted to the lowest depths of her soul by this struggle within her, which seemed to be never ending, Mell was glad to get back into the quietude of the old farm house after the continuous strain and excitement of the past few weeks. The flowers in the little garden stirred gently in the breeze; there was a gleam of blue sky above the low roof; birds chirped softly in

the euonyms hedge under the window of her own little room, and the tranquillity and serenity and staidness of the spot soothed her feverish mind and calmed her feverish spirit. It was lonely, desolate, mean, and poor, but none the less a refuge from the storms of a higher region; from the weariness of pleasure and the burden of empty enjoyment; from the tiresomeness of being amused, and the troublesomeness of seeming to be amused without being; from an ecstasy of suffering and an agony of transport; in short, a hoped-for refuge from herself and Jerome.

"Hurry up, Mell! Hurry up! He's mos' gone!"

"What, mother! You don't mean—?"

"Yes, I does, Mell. He was tuck wuss in the night. He won't know ye, I'm 'fraid."

But he did, and opening his eyes he smiled faintly, as she hung over his ugly face—uglier now, after the ravages of disease, than ever before; dried up by scorching fevers to a semblance of those parched-up things we see in archæological museums; deeply lined and seamed and furrowed, as if old Time had never had any other occupation since he was a boy but to make marks upon it; uglier than ever, but with an expression upon it which had never been there before—that solemn dignity which Death gives to the homeliest features.

"Father! father!" sobbed Mell, "don't die! Don't leave your little Mell! Don't leave me now, when I've just begun to love you as I ought!"

Ha, Mell! Just begun! He has reached a good old age, and you are a woman grown, and you have just begun to love your father! It is too late, Mell. He does not need your love now. He is trying to tell you that, or something else. Put your ear a little closer.

"What did you say, father! Try to tell me again."

And he did; she heard every word:

"Good-bye, little Mell! I ain't gwine ter mortefy ye no mo'!"

CHAPTER VI.

A DEAL IN FUTURES.

"WHY do you fret so much about it?" asked Rube, sitting beside his promised wife about a week after the old man was laid to rest. "You loved your father, of course, but—"

"There's the point!" exclaimed Mell. "I did not love him—not as a child ought to love a parent. What did it matter that his looks were common and his speech rude? His thoughts were true, his motives good, his actions honest, and now I mourn the blindness which made me value him, not for what he was, but what he looked to be. In self-forgetfulness and sacrificing devotion to me he was sublime. He went in rags that I might dress above my station; he ate coarse food that I might be served with dainties; he worked as a slave that I might hold my hands in idleness; and how did I requite him? I was ashamed of him; I held him in contempt. Oh, oh! My, my!"

"Come, now," remonstrated Rube, trying to stem the torrent of this lachrymatory deluge, and wondering what had become of all the comforting phrases in the English language, that he could not put his tongue upon one of them. "Do try to calm yourself, dearest. I know you are exag-

gerating the true state of the case, as we are all prone to do in moments of self-upbraiding. I never saw you lacking in respect to him."

"There's a great many bad things in me you never saw," blubbered Mell, breaking out afresh.

"Dear, dear!" said Rube, "I never saw such grief as this!"

"You—are—disgusted, I know?"

"Not a bit of it!" declared Rube; "just the contrary! I fairly dote on the prospect of a wife who is going to cry hard and cut up dreadful when anything happens to a fellow. It kind of makes dying seem sort of easy. But, come, now; you've cried enough. Let me comfort you."

"No, no!" cried Mell, shrinking away from him. "If you only knew, you would not want to comfort me. I do not deserve a single kind word from you. I am unworthy your regard. I am a weak woman, and a wicked one. Oh, Rube! I have not treated you right. That day at the picnic I was angry with some one else; I was piqued; I did not feel as I made you think I felt. I—that is—"

Here Mell broke down completely in her disjointed arraignment of self, thoroughly disconcerted by the young man's change of countenance. His breath came quick, a dark cloud overspread his features, and he lost somewhat of his ruddy color.

"Do you mean, then, to say I was but a tool, and the whole thing a lie and a cheat?"

Rube's thoughts sped as directly to their mark, as the well-aimed arrow from the bent bow.

"Don't be so angry with me," prayed Mell, "please don't! You don't know how much I have suffered over it. I say, at that time I thought I cared for some one else, and so I ought not, in all fairness, to have encouraged you; but, it is only since father died, that I have been able to see things in their true light. I have had a false standard of character, a false measure of worth, a false conception of human aims and human achievement. Out of the wretchedness of sleepless hours I have heard the under-tones of truth: Knowledge is great, but how much greater is goodness without knowledge than knowledge without goodness!"

Rube made no reply. He left her side, and, crossing the room, folded his arms and looked moodily out of the window. He was very simple in nature, somewhat slow, sometimes stupid; but loyal and true—true in great things, and no less true in small ones, and as open as the day.

Mell dried her eyes, and glanced at him anxiously. The worst part of her duty was now over. She began already to feel relieved; she began already to know just how she was going to feel in a few minutes more, the possessor of a conscience, void of offence before God and man. There's nothing like it—a good conscience.

"This beats all!" soliloquized Rube, at the window; "I'll be hanged if there's enough solid space in a woman's mind to peg a man's hat on! Now, just as things have panned out all right for Devonhough, here's a tombstone in my own graveyard!"

"Ha!" thought Mell, hearing, considering.

"*Just as things have panned out all right for Devonhough.*"

What did that mean? Her throbbing, panting, bursting heart knew only too well. Clara had come to a decision—she would marry Jerome, and not the Honorable Archibald.

Rube had scarcely ceased to speak when Mell raised her head.

"Rube!"

Very soft that call!

Unheeding, Rube still looked out of the window and into the past. That day at the picnic—that beautiful day, that day of days; a pure, white, luminous spot in memory's galaxy of fair and heavenly things—that day she had not felt as she had made him think she felt; hence, he had been a cat's-paw, a puppet; and she—oh, it could not be that Mell was a dissembler, a hypocrite, a serpent!"

"Rube!"

A little louder was this call.

He turned, he obeyed—no more able to resist the beckoning hand, the dulcet voice, the luring glance, than you or I the spells of our own individual Sirens and Circes.

He came back to her, but stood in gloomy waiting, his brow so dark, his expression so hard and cold and stern, that the girl on the sofa felt herself wilting and withering before him, as a frail flower in a deadly blast.

She did not say a word.

She only used two eyes of blue, and two big tears which rolled out of them, and down upon her velvet cheek, and splash upon her little white hand, with crushing effect—not upon the hand, but the beholder.

"Mell," said he, hoarsely, "what is all this? What is the meaning of it? I do not see your drift, exactly. Do you wish to be free?"

"I thought that would be *your* wish," floundered Mell, "perhaps, when you heard of that other—other fancy—you know, Rube; if I had not told you anything about it, and it had come afterwards to your knowledge, you would have thought I had not acted squarely towards you."

"So much, then, I understand; but what are your leanings now? Don't beat about the bush; speak out your wishes plainly. I am not a brute. I would release a woman at the very altar, if her inclinations leaned in another direction. Do you imagine I would care to marry a woman, however much I might love her, whose heart was occupied by another? Where would be the sanctity of such a marriage? I would be the worse defrauded man of the two. So, Melville, if there is any one you like better than you do me, speak it now. Tell me plainly, do you care for me—or some one else?"

Now, Mell, here's your chance; hasten to redeem your past. He has put the whole thing before you in a nutshell. You know just how he thinks and how he feels. After this, you dare not further betray a heart so noble, so forbearing, so true! Tell him, Mell; tell him, for your own sake; tell him, for his sake; tell him, for God's sake! Come, Mell, speak—speak quick! Don't wait a second, a single second! A second is a very little bit of time, the sixtieth part of one little minute; but, short as it is, if you hesitate, it will be long enough for you to remember that you may live to be a very old woman, and pass all your life in this old farmhouse, utterly monotonous and wearisome; that you will be very lonely; that you will be very poor; that you will be very unhappy; that you will miss Rube's jewels and Rube's sugar plums and Rube's hourly devotions, to which you have now become so well accustomed;—short, but long enough to remember all this. So speak, Mell, quick! quick! The second is gone before Mell speaks.

It was a long second for Rube.

"O Mell, Mell! can it be that you care for him and not for me? At least, let *me* hear it—let me hear the truth! I can bear anything better than this uncertainty."

Even this bitter cry brought forth no response. The dumbness of Dieffenbachia lay upon Mell's tongue.

"I see how it is," said Rube, turning to go.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Mell, pulling him back. She was now desperate. Her tear-stained face broke into April sunshine. "I do not care for that other. How could you think so? Once I thought so myself; it was a delusion. A woman cannot love a selfish, tyrannical, overbearing creature like that!—not really, though she may think so for a time; but you, Rube, you are the quintessence of goodness! you are worth a dozen such men as he!"

"So it's me!" ejaculated Rube. "I am the lucky dog! I am the quintessence of goodness!"

He drew a long breath; he sank comfortably back into the old seat and into the old sense of security, and addressed himself with a joyous air and renewed enthusiasm to the old rôle of love-making.

Just like a man—the very man who thinks he has such a deep insight into dark matters, who thinks he knows so much about everything in the wide world, especially women!

"You are the most conscientious creature alive!" declared Rube, happier than ever, over a nearly lost treasure. "The whole amount of your offence seems to be that you once thought you cared—"

"Yes—that's it! I once thought so."

"But I once thought that I cared for another girl. You would not, for that reason, wish to send me adrift, would you?"

"No. Only I wish you hadn't!"

"Just the way I feel about it."

He laughed uncontrollably.

"Pretty one! Soul of honor! What other girl would have opened her lips about such a trifle? And now I will not be put off another moment. Name the day which is to make me the happiest of men."

The day was named, and Mell really felt more composure of mind and less disquietude of spirit than she had known for many a day. She had eased, to some extent, her guilty conscience. She had shed many bitter, if unavailing, tears over Rube and her dead father; and now, convinced that she could not help herself, and determined to make the best of it, her mind drifted complacently over the long stretch of prosperous years before her, wherein she would be neither lonely, nor poor, nor unhappy, nor unloved; with sugar plums to her taste and jewels in quantity—for there are just two things in this world every young woman is sure to love—tinsel and taffy.

A healing balm now poured itself, so to speak, into her life and future prospects.

Of Jerome she saw no more. He had gone home before her father's funeral. He had seemingly passed out of her life forever. She never so much as mentioned his name, even to Rube, and she even thought of him less frequently than of yore. How could she be expected to think of him with the wedding trousseau demanding all her thoughts and time?

But one day Rube came to the farm-house, worried, and told Mell, of his own accord, that it was about Jerome and Clara. There had been a row between them.

The Honorable Archibald Pendergast, as she well knew, was no ordinary man—neither, it seemed, was he an ordinary lover. Notwithstanding his late rejection, he had been paying Clara such marked attentions in Washington that a society journal had publicly announced their engagement;

whereupon Jerome had delivered his ultimatum—she would marry him at once or else they were quits.

“And I don’t blame him,” declared Rube, “not one bit! He stood as much at her hands, and stood it as long, as a man *can* stand. I never could have taken the same from you.”

Ah, Rube, we little know, any of us, just what we are taking at any hour in the day and at the hands of our own friends!

It is well for us that we do not.

“And now,” inquired Mell, scarcely able to articulate, so great was her agitation, “what is Clara going to do?”

“She is going to marry the Honorable Archibald,” replied Rube, adding, with the breezy disgust of a sunny temper: “It’s a confounded shame! He’s old enough for her father, and I don’t believe she cares *that* about him! But he’s a great statesman, and there’s a good prospect of his getting into the White House some of these days; and some women love social eminence better than they do their own souls! I am glad you are not one of that kind, Mell—you will be content with your planter husband, won’t you, Mell?”

“I have written him to come to our wedding,” pursued Rube. “I like him as well as ever—even more! He’s a splendid fellow! I hope he will come, but I think it hardly probable.”

Mell thought, too, it was hardly probable. After this, things went wrong again with Mell. Her trousseau ceased to occupy her time and attention; her wayward thoughts waged internecine strife in regions of turmoil and vain speculation.

Meanwhile, Jerome made no sign.

“Woe is me!” wept Mell. Much had she wept since her father died; but a dead man is not half so sore a subject of weeping as a living woman’s unworthiness, when it falls under her own judgment.

“To do right is the only thing,” moaned the unhappy girl—“to do right and give no heed to consequences. I have learned the lesson at last. It has been a hard one. Henceforth I am going to do right though I slay myself in the doing.”

She prayed that night as she had never prayed in all her life before. She asked for divine help in doing right by Rube. And she arose from her knees strengthened to do her duty, as she then conceived it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST STRUGGLE.

AND the quiet days pass one by one—each one very like the other—until the last sun has set, and the evening lights gleam in the old farm-house on the last night before the wedding-day—that wedding-day which she had, to the very last, put off to the latest possible time. Under the hush of evening skies, in the flower decked garden, in the dreamy grey air, in the sight of fallow fields glistening in the moonlight, Rube is saying good-night.

“To bed early,” was the parting injunction of Mell’s future lord; “we have a long journey before us.”

“Yes,” answered Mell, solemnly, “a very long journey. The journey of life.”

"However long, all too short," was Rube's fond reply. He stroked her lovely hair. "Mell!

' May never night 'twixt me and you
With thoughts less fond arise ! ' "

After he was gone Mell repeated those words, "a very long journey." Then she sighed.

It would have to be a very long journey, indeed, to correspond with this sigh of Mell's—a very long sigh.

Well, there is no better time for a woman to sigh than the night before she is married. Nor are tears amiss. Not one in ten knows what she's about; for, if she did, she would not—

On the brink of the Untried there is room enough to stop and look about one, to think better of it, to turn around and go back; only no man or woman was ever yet gifted with brains enough to do it. The things unknown, which loom up so temptingly into sight upon the brink of the Untried, look far more desirable, infinitely more tempting, than all the known blessings of the past. And so Mell sighed—but lifted not a finger to save herself.

She went back into the little parlor to finish packing some favorite trifles in a box to be sent to the Bigge House ere she returned—school friend's mementoes and some of Rube's presents.

Thus engaged, outside was heard the noise of stamping hoofs and the rumbling of wheels—some vehicle stopped at the gate—somebody came up the sanded garden path, ascended the steps, crossed the little porch and gave a hasty rap upon the front door.

Mell sprang to her feet. It thrilled her strangely, that footstep on the porch, that knock upon the door.

Who could be coming there at such an hour—and the night before her wedding?

Rube, perhaps; something he had forgotten to do or say. She would go to the door; she started, and came back. She listened again.

It was not Rube's step—it was not Rube's knock.

Her senses were ever alert; she always noticed such things.

But the man outside had no time to lose, and did not propose to wait there all night. He cleared his throat impatiently and knocked again. This knock was louder than the first and more peremptory. It had a remarkable effect upon Mell—a startling effect.

She sank upon the nearest chair, she trembled from head to foot; wild thoughts whirled through her anarchical brain with the swiftness of a whirlwind, and it was not until the persistent intruder knocked the third time that she succeeded, through breath coming thick and fast, and half-palsied lips, faintly to call out, "Come in!"

And the man came in, and the girl, crouching upon the chair, as if she would fain hide herself down in depths of concealment where he would never find her, felt no surprise, knowing already the late comer was Jerome.

Jerome—but not at his best. He had been sick—or, so she thought, her affrighted eyes sweeping over him in one swift glance. Pale was his face, and careworn; physically, Jerome had never appeared so ill; spiritually, he had never appeared to better advantage.

There are perplexed and ethereal truths in the heart of human things which no bloom of health ever yet expressed. The sweetness pressed out of suffering by the operations of its own nature, clothes itself in a subtler and more irresistible charm than was ever yet discovered in the hues of a

pearly complexion, or the rays of a brilliant eye. From under the potent spell of its attraction, we soon forget a countenance merely beautiful; we never forget the one made beautiful through suffering.

Our sainted mother, who went through rivers of fire and a thousand death agonies ere death itself came; who died, at last, with a joyful smile on her face, bidding us meet her on the other shore—we do not forget how *she* looked!

Our heroic father, borne home from the battle-field, with his death wound; who bade us with his last breath to serve God and our country—we do not forget how *he* looked! These are the images indelibly fixed in the sensitized slide of memory, while the peach-bloom face upon the boulevard, the merry face in the dance, fade as fades the glory of a flower.

Jerome has suffered. Some of his youth he has left behind him. But with that youth he has left, too, much of his suffering. At this moment every feature in his facial federation of harmonious elements was lighted up with a kindling spirit of its own. Whatever the inspiration, whether intrinsically noble, or ignoble, it is to its possessor a glorious inspiration. We say noble, or ignoble; for, one man's glory may be another man's shame, and both true men. So, perhaps, no cause is great in itself, but only great in the conception of the soul who conceives it and who fights for it.

Out of Jerome's presence, Mell had branded him as a being selfish, tyrannical, and incapable of long retaining a woman's love; in his presence she only knew he was the embodiment of life's supreme good.

But worse than a flaming sword was now the sight of the man she loved. She dreaded the sound of his coming voice as she dreaded the trump of Doom. What would he say—he who handled words as a skilful surgeon manipulates cutting-instruments, to kill or cure—what would he say to the woman who had been untrue to her word?

He said absolutely nothing.

No formal salutation passed between the two. Drawing a chair directly in front of the hostess, by whom his coming was so little expected, Jerome sat down upon it and regarded the agitated face and the almost cowering form of the woman before him, in profound silence.

She had dreaded his words, had she? Heavens! This wordless arraignment of her guilty self at the bar of her own conscience, her silent accuser both judge and jury, and only two wretched hearts, which ached as one, for witness, was worse than a true bill found in a crowded court of justice. A storm of angry words, a typhoon, a sorocco, a veritable Dakota blizzard of sweeping invective, would have been easy lines compared to this.

She would die—Mell knew she would—of sheer shame and self-reproach, before this awful silence, which threatened to continue to the end of time, was ever broken.

Would he never open his mouth and say something, no matter how dreadful?

He did, at last.

"Mellville," said Jerome, gently, "are you glad to see me?"

"No!" passionately.

"Not glad? Then you are the most ungrateful, as well as the most faithless, of mortal beings. I have travelled long to get here. My reaching here in time was uncertain, well nigh a hopeless matter; but nothing is hopeless to the man who dares. What did I come for? Do you know?"

"To load me with reproaches. Do it and begone!"

"No, Mell; I have not come for that! There's no salvation in abuse,

and I have come to save. Perhaps, Mell, there is no one in the whole world who understands you—your nature, in its strength and in its weakness—as well as I. You are not a perfect woman, Mell; you have one fault, but even that fault I love because I so love you! And I see so plainly just how and why your love has failed me in my utmost need, and I know so well just how and why the conditions of existence, amid such surroundings as this, must be utterly unendurable to a girl of your temperament and aims. And so, through all my anger and all my sorrow and all my wounded affection, I have made excuses in my heart for my pretty Mell, my faithless Mell, whom I still love in spite of all her weakness; who in that weakness could find no other way of escape from a poor, bald, common-place, distasteful life, except through the crucifixion of her own heart, the ruin of her own happiness. Weak, you are nevertheless far dearer to me than the strongest-minded of your sex; false in act but not at heart, you are still the sweetest to me of all sweet womanhood; and I have come to save, not to reproach you! Here is what I bring. It goes fittingly with the heart long in your possession.”

He reached forth his hand to her. Mell inspected it with those dark and regretful looks we bestow on the blessings which are for others, but not for us.

This was the hand whose touch conferred happiness; a hand so strong, so firm, so steady, perfect in every joint and finger-tip, endowed with all the intellectual subtlety and effective mechanism of which the hand of man is capable—the only hand, among thousands and ten-thousands of human hands, she had ever wanted for her own—and now here it was, so near, and, alas! farther than ever before! She clenched her own hands convulsively together, and closed her eyes to shut out the sight of it and the entreating tenderness of its appeal.

“Take it,” said Jerome, seductively; “it is now mine to give, and yours to accept.”

“Too late,” returned Mell, in sadness; “to-morrow I wed with Rube.”

“*To-morrow?* Yes, I know. But have you ever reflected what a long way off to-morrow is? and how little we need to dread the coming of to-morrow, if we look well after to-day? And, my dear Mell, how many things occur to-night ere to-morrow ever comes! That’s another thing you have not thought about. In your plans for marrying Rube to-morrow, you have neglected to take into consideration”—the rest he whispered into her ear, so low, so low she could scarcely catch it, but the sudden crash of brazen instruments, the sharp clash of steel, a thunderbolt at her very feet could not have made her start so violently or convulsed her with such terror—“*the fact that you are going to marry me to-night!*” With a gesture of instinctive repugnance, with a look of supplicating horror, she pushed him away.

“Only devils tempt like that!”

“No devil ever yet tempted a woman to right-doing.”

“It could not be right to treat Rube so.”

“It is the only way to right a wrong already done him.”

“No. I am going to make that wrong up to Rube. I have sworn to do it! I am going to stick by Rube through thick and thin. You go away! What did you come here for? Dark is the fate of the woman who breaks her plighted vows.”

“Darker still the fate of the woman who seals false vows. Such are untrue to the high instincts of the immortal within them.”

"But think how infamous! how base such an act! how scandalous! I cannot do it!"

"Yet, you will do worse—far worse. A loveless marriage is worse than a broken vow. Such a marriage may pass current for legal tender in the courts of the world, but when some day, you come to square up accounts, you will find fraudulent bonds and unholy speculation in married estate the worst investment a foolish woman ever made. Dishonesty never pays, but it pays less in a marriage without love than anywhere else. And where's the use of trying to deceive Rube and the rest of the world, when God knows? You can't very well hoodwink *Him*, Mell. And how will you be able to endure it; to be clothed in marvellously fine garments and ride in a chariot, and envy the beggars as you pass them in their honest rags; to be a Jonas in every kiss, a Machiavelli in every word, a crocodile in every tear; Janus-faced on one side, and mealy-mouthed on the other; to be a fraud, a sham, a make-believe, an organized humbug, and a painted sepulchre? That's the picture of the woman who marries one man and loves another. Is it a pleasant picture, Mell? You will chafe behind the gilded bars, and champ the jewelled bit. You will feel the sickening thralldom of a cankering memory, a rankling regret, a sullen remorse, a longing after your true self, with every breath a lie, every act a counterfeit, every word a mincing of the truth. God only knows how you will bear it!"

God only—she did not. Her head drooped lower in unspeakable bitterness and humiliation. Amid all the darkness she could see but one ray of light.

"But if I do my duty—" began Mell.

"A woman's first duty to her husband is to love him," said Jerome, gravely; "failing in that, she fails in all else."

"But love comes with the doing of duty, everybody says. I must do my duty by Rube."

"Very well. Do your duty, Mell, but do it now. That is all I ask. Manifestly it is not your duty to marry him. With every throb of your heart pulsating for me, you will not be worth one dollar to Rube in the capacity of a wife. He would tell you so, if he knew. Can't you see that, Mell?"

She could see it distinctly. Jerome's words burned with the brilliancy of magnesium, throwing out this aspect of the subject in glaring light. Rube stood again before her, as he had stood on the morning of that day upon which she had undertaken to fulfil her promise to Jerome and failed so ignominiously—stood, and was saying: "*I would be the most defrauded man of the two,*" and "*where would be the sanctity of such a marriage?*"

Not one dollar would she be worth to him—if he knew! He would know some time; everything under the sun gets known somehow, the only question—when?

Seeing the impression made, Jerome spoke again, in words low, impassioned:

"Save yourself, for the love of God! Save yourself and Rube from such a fate!"

Mell glanced about her in terror and confusion, turning red and pale. Gladly would she save herself; but how can a respectable member of good society accept salvation at such a price—the price of being talked about?

"It is too late," she told her companion, in tones as sorrowful as the wail of a wandering bard in a strange land; "too late! Why, man, the bridal robes are ready, the bridal cake is baked, the bridal guests are

bidden; and would you have me, at this last minute, turn Rube into a laughing-stock, a by-word on every idle lip, a man to be pointed out upon the streets, a man to be jeered at in the crowd? Would you have me do that?"

"Yes. That is not a happy lot, but it soon passes, and is better than being duped for life and wretched for life."

Mell averted her face. She seemed striving for words:

"I don't see why Rube should be so unhappy as you seem determined to make him. Even granting that he knew that I do not feel romantically towards him, as I have felt towards you—"

"Have felt?" interposed her listener.

She waived his question aside and proceeded:

"Still there is a love born of habit and propinquity, and that will come to my rescue. Rube is a splendid fellow! I respect him. I honor his character, and I could be happy with him if—"

"Well," said Jerome, huskily, "go on."

"If it were not for you."

"Ha!" exclaimed he, "has it come to that? That alters the case completely. I will take myself off, then! I will get out of your way! Had I suspected the existence of one drop of real affection in your heart towards the man you are about to marry, I would have cut off this right hand of mine rather than come here to-night. In coming I was sustained by the belief that I would not defraud my friend—not in reality—not of any thing he could value; not of a wife, but of an empty casket. This belief, on my part, is all that redeems my coming from being an act of diabolism. And now it turns out that there is a very good reason why the bridal cake cannot be thrown to the dogs, and the bridal robes cannot be committed to the flames, and the bridal guests cannot upon any account be robbed of their bride upon the morrow—*you could be happy with him if it were not for me!*"

Bitter in tone was this repetition of her words—words which wounded him so keenly. They were calculated to wound the tender sensibilities of any lover, most of all a lover of Jerome Devonhough's stamp. He could condone any weakness on her part, except that which touched his own dominion over her—the sceptre of his love, the yoke of his power. Under a pacific exterior, there seethed in Jerome, volcanic masses of self-will and unchangeable purpose; hemmed in, held in bounds, seldom breaking forth in violent eruption, but always there. He was totally unprepared for any change in the feelings of the woman upon whom he had lavished the arbitrary tenderness of his own strong nature. Jerome, you perceive, is no more of a hero than Mell is a heroine. He is the counterpart of the man who lives round the corner, who sits next you in church, whom you meet not unfrequently at your friend's house at dinner. This man loves his wife, not because she is an artistic production, elaborately wrought out in broad, mellow, triumphant lines, grand in character, but rather because he recognizes good material in her for his own moulding. We must never approach the contemplation of any man's requirements in a wife with our minds full of loose generalities. There is so much of the fool in every man, the wisest man, who falls in love. He falls in love, not so much with what is ideally lovable in a woman, but what is practically complementary to his own nature. Jerome, being strong, loved Mell, who was weak, and weak in those very places where Jerome was strong. She needed him. He felt that he was a necessary adjunct to her perfect development in the sphere of womanhood; he felt that she was necessary to him in the enlargement of his manhood.

For, does not a man of his type need some one to guide, to govern, to lord it over, and to get all the nonsense out of? But he would love her, too, notwithstanding all this, with that sheltering devotion which a woman needs—all women, with one exception. A strong woman in her strength is not dependent upon any man's love.

"So it has come to this," pursued Jerome, brooding in low tones over the matter, "there is but one impediment to your happiness—the man whom you have professed to love, whom you have so basely resigned. With me safely out of the way, you and Rube are all right. You do, it seems, know your own mind at last. And Clara Rutland knows hers at last, and everybody is about to be made incontinently happy—everybody but me! I am left out in the cold! I am left, between you all, stranded on the lonely rock of unbelief, either in a woman's word or a woman's love; and must eat alone, and digest as best I may, all the sour grapes left over from two marriage-feasts. A pleasant prospect, truly! Would to God I had never seen either one of you!"

Mell was dumb. She was dumb from conviction. Clara Rutland *had* treated him badly, and so had she; and she could think of nothing to say which would put in any fairer light that ugly treatment. She marvelled at his patience through it all; she was bewildered that he had thus far, during this trying interview, remained

"In high emotions self-controlled."

She knew a change must come. She saw through furtive eyes and without raising her head, that a change had already come. Not even a strong will can regulate a heart's pulsations—a heart which has been sinned against in its most sacred feelings. As the storm-clouds sweep up from the west and mass themselves with awful grandeur in battle array, so lowered dark and tempestuous thoughts, pregnant with danger, on the young man's brow. Across his frame there swept a convulsive quiver of emotion; his features took on that hard, stern look of repressed indignation and passion which Mell so well knew and so much feared.

With that look upon his face, Jerome was not a man to be trifled with.

But what was he going to do? Shake her again?

She said nothing when he took hold of her two hands with a grasp of iron. Silently she awaited her fate; tremblingly she wondered what that fate would be.

He was only telling her good-by. He knew not how hard he pressed upon those tender hands; he only knew he might never clasp them in his own again. It was a terrible moment—terrible not alone for Mell.

One would have thought, seeing how he suffered in giving her up, that she was the last woman in the world; whereas, we know there are multitudes of them, many more estimable in character, some equally desirable in person, with just such wondrous hair, just such enchanting eyes, just such shapeliness of construction, enough in itself to inspire mankind with the most passionate love—plenty of her kind, but none exactly Mell!

Sensible of that detaining clasp; knowing his keen eyes scanned darkly and hungrily every quivering feature in her unquiet face; hearing his labored breath and the low sobs wrung from a strong man's agony, Mell felt first as a guilty culprit.

If only he would stab her to the heart, and then himself.

We little thought, any of us, when we saw him lying in the meadow on the grass at her feet, that out of the joyous inspiration of that glorious

summer weather, out of two young lives so beautiful, out of young love, a thing so full of poetry and romance, would come such wretchedness as this.

After a little while, the touch of those rose-leaf palms, the whiteness of her face, the appeal for mercy in those eyes seeking his own, had a soothing effect upon Jerome. He would now put forth all his strength and quietly say good-by.

Softly he pressed to his lips one of those imprisoned hands; softly, in a heart-sick rapture of despairing renunciation, he was about to do the same with the other, when the glint of Rube's solitaire, the pledge of her hated bondage to another, the glaring witness of her treachery towards himself, flashed into his eyes and overcame all his good resolutions. With a look of unutterable reproach, with a gesture of undying contempt, he tossed the offending hand back upon her lap.

"Think not," he broke forth, in vehement utterance, "that no thought of me will embitter your bridal joys! I leave you to your fate! I go to my own! Dark it may be, but not darker than yours!"

And this was the quiet way in which he bade her good-by.

The words pierced Mell to the very soul, and, combined with the blackness of his countenance, filled her with indefinable, but very horrible imaginings. He had almost reached the door, when with a smothered cry of pain, she followed him.

As irresistibly as ever he drew her.

"Jerome! Jerome! Where are you going?"

"To ruin!" exclaimed he, turning upon her with that barbaric fierceness which seems to underlie everything strong in nature—"to ruin, where you women without principle, have sent many a better man! To ruin, and to hell, if I choose," he added, with fearful emphasis. "My going and my coming are no longer any concern of yours!"

"Yes, they are, Jerome," she assured him, deprecatingly. "Don't leave me in anger, Jerome!"

"Not in anger? Then, how—in delight?" There was now a menacing gleam in his eye which more than ever alarmed her. "My cause is lost. You have done me all the wrong you could, and now that I am dismissed, set aside, told to begone, debased, and dethroned, you expect me to be delighted over it, do you?"

"No, Jerome; but do not leave me feeling so. Promise me to do nothing rash."

"I will not promise you anything! You have not spared my feelings, why should I spare yours? Since your affection for me has moderated into that platonic kind, which admits of your happiness in union with another, I will do whatever I please to do, knowing no act of mine, however dreadful, will affect you."

"Oh, Jerome, do not say that! You must see, you must know in your heart, that I do still care for you—Oh, God! more than I ought."

"And yet not enough to make you do what is right!"

"But to right you, will wrong Rube," she answered in confusion.

"Enough, then: you know your own feelings, or ought to. Since Rube is the one dearest to you, marry him!"

He turned again upon his heel. Obeying an impulse she could not resist, Mell once more detained him. It is hard to die, everybody says; but to die yourself must be easier than to give up the one you love.

"Jerome, wait a moment! Come back! Jerome, you do not realize what a dishonorable thing this is you are persuading me to do?"

"Don't I?" he laughed wildly. "God Almighty! Mellville, what do you

take me for? Wouldn't I have been here a week ago, two weeks ago, but for the battle I have had to fight with my own scruples—but for the war I have had to wage with my own soul? I have said to myself, again and again, 'I will not do this thing though I die!' But when I started out upon this journey, it had come to this: 'I must do this thing or else—die!'"

Shaken as a storm-rifted tree bending in the blast, she was not yet uprooted.

"It is hard, hard," she murmured, wringing her hands in nervous constraint; "but time, you know, Jerome, time softens everything."

"It does!" he said, harshly—"even the memory of a crime!"

"What do you mean by that?" exclaimed Mell, every word of his filling her with indefinable fears.

"I mean what I say. Once out of the way, you and Rube, the two beings most dear to me on earth, could be happy together; you have told me so. Then, how selfish in me—"

"Oh, Jerome, you would not! Surely you would not do such a thing!"

"I do not say that I would, nor that I would not. A desperate man is not to be depended on either by himself or others. I only know that in this fearful upheaval of all my life's aims and ends, any fate seems easier than living. But Mellville—" his tones were now quiet, but they were firm; his lips were set in angles of immovable resolve; his brow bent and dark with the shadows of unlifting determination. It would be difficult to imagine a more striking figure than Jerome in the rôle of a man who had made up his mind—

'But Mellville, this struggle must end. It must end *now*, or it will put an end to us. I did not come here to-night to submit to the humiliation of begging a woman to marry me against her will. I came to rescue a being in distress from the painful consequences of her own rash act. Now, then, you love me, or you do not? You will marry me, or you will not? Which is it? Answer! In five minutes I leave this house, with or without you!"

He dropped upon his knees at her feet; he snatched her to his breast. Reason was gone, his soul all aflame:

"Mell, listen: Love is more than raiment, more than food, more than the world's censure or the world's praise. It is sweeter in life than life itself! But time presses; the other wedding comes on apace; we have no time to spare. An hour's hard driving will bring us to Parson Fordham's, well known to me. There we will be married at once, and catch the early train at Pudney. Our names will be an execration and a by-word for a little time, but what of that? What though all friends turn their backs upon us! Together we will enter hopefully upon a new life, loving God and each other—a life of truer things, Mell; a life consecrated to each other and glorified by perfect love and perfect trust. Will you lead that life with me?"

"No, I will not!"

"What, Mellville!" he cried. "You will not! I thought you loved me, loved me as I loved you?"

"Once I loved you," she said. She spoke now as much to her own soul as to his perceptions. "Once—or was it only that I thought I did? For long weeks I struggled against deceiving Rube, and out of that I must have drifted by slow degrees into deceiving myself. For, to-night, even to-night, when I parted from Rube I thought it was you I loved, not he! But the mists have lifted from my vision, and now, at this moment—never fully until this moment—I see you both in your true light; I weigh you understandingly, one against the other; I set your self-seeking against his unselfishness, your improbity against his high sense of honor. And how

plainly I see it all! Just as if a moral kaleidoscope were exhibiting by spiritual reflections, to the eyes of my mind, the difference between one man and another, at an angle of virtue which is the aliquot part of three hundred and sixty degrees of real merit! Upon this disk of the imagination appears your own image; and what are you doing? Passing me by as an unknown thing, a thing too small to know in the presence of mighty magnates at a county picnic! There is another manly form; what is he doing? Lifting me up from the bare earth where the other's cruel slights have crushed me; feeding me with his own hands; even then loving me. How different the pictures! Shift the scene. Some one is crowning me: I am a queen before the world. Whose hand has held a crown for me? Not yours—Rube's! You had not the courage. He had. I love courage in a man. I love it better than a handsome face or an oily tongue. A man without courage—what is he? He isn't a man at all—not really. Jerome Devonhough," here she turned her lovely face, grown so cold, and her exquisite eyes, grown so scornful, full upon him, "were you the right sort of a man, would you be here to-night? Will a man, false to his friend, be true to his wife? I can trust Rube Rutland; can I trust you? No! For, even while loving, I could not keep down a feeling of contempt. Beginning with respect for Rube, that sentiment of respect has ripened into love—real love—not the wild, senseless, mad, unreasoning passion of an untutored girl, which eats into its own vitals, and drains its own lees,—as mine for you,—but that deeper, better, higher, more enduring, and well-nigh perfect affection of the full-lived woman, who out of deep suffering has emerged into an enlightened conception of her own nature's needs, her own heart's craving for what is best, truest, most God-like in a man! That love, which will wear well, nor grow threadbare through time, which will take on a more wondrous glow in the realms of eternity, is the love I feel for Rube!"

"Bah!" he exclaimed, not yet quenched, not yet hopeless. "Eternity is a long word, and all your fine talking cannot deceive *me*! Oh, woman, woman, what a face you have, and what brains! I do not know which holds me tighter. That face so fair, that mind so subtle—together they might well turn the head of the devil himself, but they cannot deceive *me*! The string which draws you is golden. It is not Rube you love so much, so purely, so perfectly; oh, no, not Rube! Not Rube, but his possessions. Not the man—the man's house! Its beautiful turrets and gables, its gardens and lawns, its lovely views, and spacious luxury, and abounding wealth. For that you give me up. Still loving me, Rube's pelf is dearer still!"

"Not now—not now! Now I love *him*—the man! Not for what he has, but for what he is. For his truth, his nobility, his honor; and, as that honor is in my keeping, I bid you go and return no more. Your power to tempt me from my duty *and my love* is over! My faith is grounded, my purpose unalterable. Go!"

"This is folly. Come with me!" he cried, striving to draw her towards the door.

She resisted.

"Come!" he urged.

She broke from him, crying:

"No, by heaven! Were it the only chance to save my own life, I would not go! I have done with you now, forever!"

"Good-night, then," he told her, with a bitter sneer and a low, mocking bow. "Good-night; but you will be sorry for this! You will regret this night's work all the days of your life. Its memory will darken the brightest day of your life!"

She did not speak, or move, as he turned upon his heel and left her.

There sounds his foot upon the stair, and next upon the gravelled walk ! And now the garden-gate swings open, and the carriage-door bangs shut, after which the wheels grate upon the pebbles, and the clatter of horses' hoofs rings out upon the midnight air. Gone ! Gone !

Her head reels ; all her senses seem benumbed. Not even a heavy tread through the dark entry did she hear. It was the clasp of strong arms around her which woke her from her trance.

She turned, exclaiming in alarm : " Rube ! You here ! You—you have heard ?"

" Every word. I was up ; I could not sleep. Does any man sleep the night before he is married ? I could not. I lighted a cigar and went out upon the lawn. At the gate I stood, puffing away and looking up in this direction, wondering if my sweet wife that is to be had obeyed my parting injunctions and gone to sleep, when presently a carriage came tearing along, going in the very direction of my own thoughts. A man sat within ; I cannot say that I exactly recognized that man in the moonlight, but I saw him move quickly back when he saw me, and that aroused my suspicions. I followed ; I could not help following. Something told me my happiness was menaced, my love in danger. I was determined to know the truth, Mell. I listened."

" And you do not hate me ?"

" Hate you, Mell ? Dearer to me than ever you are at this moment ! I know how you have been tempted ; I realize all you have overcome. Never could I doubt such love ! Comforted by it, I can bear up even under so heavy a misfortune as the treachery of a friend. But the hour is late ; we must not talk longer ; you must snatch a little rest. Good-night once more, dear love. To-morrow, Mellville, you will be mine—to-morrow !"

" Aye, Rube ! To-morrow, yours ! Upon every day and every morrow of my life, always yours !"

THE END.

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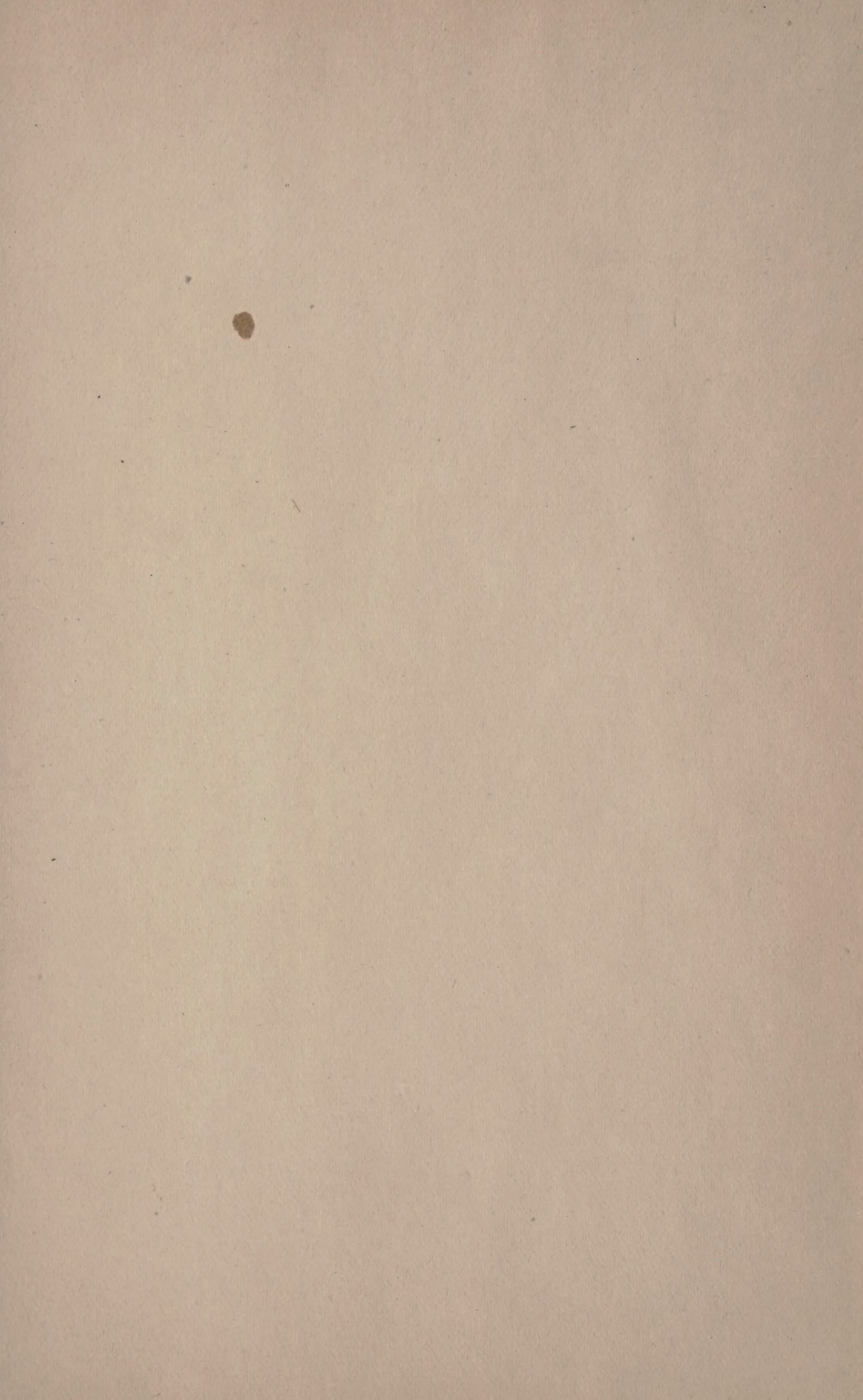
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